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SPENSER, THE SCHOOL OF THE  
FLETCHERS, AND MILTON

BY  
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BY

HERBERT E. CORY

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Critics have made merry with the literary alchemists who have striven to analyze Milton. By this study I confess allegiance to what Mr. Walter Raleigh calls "the ledger school of criticism." Professor Masson asserted that all attempts to find the sources of Milton are "for the most part dull and laborious." Yet many adventurers in the delightful land of poetry will remain unsatisfied. We all know that a supreme genius exercises much of his creative instinct in the subtle art of selection. He ransacks the supreme poets of the past until they stir him to write. He chooses even from the conventions and commonplaces of a hundred minor men of his day, letting the worthless die, giving final expression to the best. When we follow him in his academe, play the eavesdropper as he listens to the elders of his deep-browed brotherhood, steal after him on his quiet walks to his favorite nooks, we are not blaspheming him. The figure of the exquisite flower, rent by the ruthless hands of the scientist, is overworked. When the analyzer of a great poet has finished his work he has not only increased our understanding and sympathy, but deepened the mystery and our reverence.

Milton, one of the most composite of poets, certainly learned much of his eloquence from the gentle dreamer Edmund Spenser, who, in his turn, had distilled his magic from a myriad springs. The younger poet, indeed, was proud to call the singer of *The*

*Faërie Queene* his master. "Milton," said Dryden, "has acknowledged to me that Spenser was his original."<sup>1</sup> It has been said that Mathew Lownes, who published the folio edition of *The Faërie Queene* in 1609, furnished the boy Milton with a copy of Spenser.<sup>2</sup> The publisher of the volume of 1645 contributed a preface in which, thinks Professor Mackail, "We can certainly hear an echo of Milton's own voice and judgment." "I know not . . . how harmonious thy soul is," writes the publisher, "perhaps more trivial Airs may please thee better. But . . . let the event guide itself which way it will, I shall deserve of the age, by bringing into the Light as true a Birth, as the Muses have brought forth since our famous *Spencer* wrote; whose Poems in these . . . are as rarely imitated, as sweetly excell'd." In his maturity Milton wrote of his master as "our admired Spenser"<sup>3</sup> and, with characteristic appreciation of the lofty moral purpose of *The Faërie Queene*, as "our sage and serious Spenser, whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas."<sup>4</sup> From Spenser, the well-beloved of all young poets, Milton learned much of that love for sensuous beauty that fought against his harsher Puritan characteristics and made him more wholesome. From Spenser's diction, a rich composition from choicest obsolete words, from rare dialects and colloquialisms, and from the poet's own fancy, Milton probably drew much which he fused with his sonorous borrowings from the Latin to build up a matchless poetic speech.<sup>5</sup> Dryden, in his

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<sup>1</sup> *Preface to the Fables*.

<sup>2</sup> Masson, *Life*, 1, 89, can find no authority for this statement of Todd's. See also John Mitford, *Aldine Edition of Milton*, 1857, p. iv: "Humphrey Lownes, the printer who lived in the same street, supplied him with Spenser."

<sup>3</sup> *Animadversions upon the Remonstrant's Defence against Smectymnus*, edition of *Prose Works*, Symmons, 1, 197.

<sup>4</sup> *Areopagitica*.

<sup>5</sup> The question of Milton's borrowings from Spenser's diction would make an elaborate linguistic thesis in itself. Many words, of course, could not be settled absolutely. We could not always tell whether Milton was drawing from Spenser or from some Chaucerian predecessor. We could not often tell whether he was borrowing from Spenser directly or from one of the many poets for whom Spenser had given the word currency. I append a brief list of typical examples drawn from hundreds of words which the commentators have set down in their notes as taken

*Essay on Satire*, gives interesting contemporary (if not infallible), testimony concerning Milton's free use of Spenser's words:

"His antiquated words were his choice, not his necessity, for therein he imitated Spenser as Spenser imitated Chaucer."

Even if Milton did not take many words from *The Shepherds Calender* or *The Faërie Queene*, he found in Spenser stimulating suggestion for enriching poetic utterance with the neglected jewels of antique poets.

But the boy Milton took some of his Spenser second-hand from contemporary Spenserians who, for the moment, loomed large because they were in the foreground. The juvenilia of great poets are almost always tinged with the intermediary influence of the *poetae minimi* of the day who echo their masters with facile prettiness. So Keats, in his early work, took some of his Spenser with sugar and water from Hunt. By 1627 the names of Giles and Phineas Fletcher must have been prominent at Milton's own university, Cambridge, where he was a novitiate in poetry for seven years. The Fletchers seized upon subjects which were in the air. In an age of religious poetry they wrote quaintly and often beautifully, in ingenious and eccentric allegory, of the life of Christ and of the soul of man. They borrowed reverently, but with naïve freedom, from the riches of *The Faërie Queene*, which they ransacked from end to end for allegorical figures, memorable lines, sometimes nearly whole stanzas. Over all they embroidered the curious, stiff conceits that were everywhere high in favor. They were enthusiastic imitators of the Spenserian stanza. As Spenser had given new music to the eight-line stanza by the addition of a final alexandrine, so the Fletchers experimented by adding the long line to the rhyme-royal, the *ottava rima*, and many other current

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from Spenser. I do not wish to defend them individually but to make a brief specimen list for the sake of general impressions.

*Assays* (= assaults), *cease* (cause to cease), *jolly* (handsome), *ragged* (rugged), *desery* (describe), *dainty limbs*, *hosting* (an Irish word), *arborets*, *infamous* (so accented also in Spenser), *say* (tell), *daintest*, *y-chain'd* (and numerous other participles with *y-*), *recure* (recover), *appaid*, *far-fet*, *recreant*, *in place* (on this occasion), *purpled*, *pranckt*, *turkis*, *prowest knight*, *captiv'd*, etc.

forms. The influence of the Fletchers was far greater than has generally been realized. They founded a distinct school of poetry which outlived the chilling influence of the Restoration. Even in the eighteenth century the school survived in the work of William Thompson, one of the earliest definite romanticists of that period. In Milton's day, most of the Cantabrigians, Crashaw, Joseph Beaumont, Thomas Robinson, and others, wrote more or less in their manner. In his boyhood Milton was enlisted in the School of the Fletchers and their influence is traceable even in his mature poems. Any study of Spenserian material in Milton, then, should include an elaborate examination of the work of the School of the Fletchers. As the reader follows my elaborate analysis of these old poets he may well criticise me for rummaging in the dustiest rooms of the storehouse of poetry. But if his patience carries him to the discussion of Milton himself he will see that an investigation of what we may call the immediate poetic environs of Milton throws an interesting light on the work of the great poet without in the least besmirching it.

### THE SCHOOL OF THE FLETCHERS

In 1603, in *Sorrow's Joy*, a book of elegies on Queen Elizabeth, Giles and Phineas Fletcher made their first unobtrusive appearance in print by joining the group of poets who filled this volume with starched lamentations over their adored Eliza. The contribution of Phineas, the elder and more prolific, is significant as a much more elaborate stanzaic experiment than that of his brother. And throughout his many poems Phineas is notable for playing a considerable number of variations on the Spenserian stanza.<sup>6</sup> Giles chose to imitate his master simply by taking the rhyme-royal ready-made and by adding an alexandrine. To this measure he remained faithful in his master-

<sup>6</sup> An enumeration of Fletcher's experiments may be worth while: *abababccC*, *ababcC*, *ababB*, *ababbccC*, *abaabbccC*, *ababbbaaccC*, *aaaabbB*, *ababbC* (a stanza used by Milton in certain early poems which show the influence of the Fletchers), *ababccc*, *abababcC*, *ababbC* (with all the *b*'s feminine rhymes), *abbaabcaecC*, *aaAbbBccC* etc., *ababecC*.

piece. Significant, too, is the fact that the younger poet's *A Canto upon the Death of Eliza*, though very boyish, shows far more promise than Phineas Fletcher's *On the Death of Queen Elizabeth*. The younger brother was the first to publish his ambitious masterpiece, greater than anything Phineas ever did. With its rapturous close his inspiration seems to have flickered out. The gentle, fluent muse of the elder poet was with him throughout the leisurely course of his whole life.<sup>7</sup>

### PHINEAS FLETCHER

Phineas Fletcher (1582-1650) served his apprenticeship in that green-sickness of love which distressed young Colin Clout. Various love-lyrics, now ardent, now bitter, now cynical, all bearing the stamp of extreme youth, establish this. He came into the more ample and pure air of the best sonnets of the *Amoretti* and the *Epithalamion* as is evidenced by *To My Onely Chosen Valentine and Wife* and a *Hymn* in close imitation of Spenser's marriage-hymn. Finally he bid regretful farewell to

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<sup>7</sup> Text-books usually assert that Giles Fletcher made his stanza by dropping the seventh line of Spenser's stanza (*ababbcb|b|cC*), thus, perhaps, shirking the demands of a difficult extra rhyme. Similarly many critics, from Edward Phillips to Lowell, give us an impossible description of the Spenserian stanza in the making—an awkward and elaborate shifting of lines in the *ottava rima*. The psychology of the whole matter is far more obvious. Spenser found a solid structure in the *ababbcbcb* stanza, used somewhat by Chaucer and more freely by the fifteenth century poets. Whether or not there had been a suggestive and more than sporadic use of the alexandrine in some of the poetry which Higgins contributed to *The Mirror for Magistrates*, as Professor Morton argues, it was Spenser who first began any elaborate experimentation with this long line as a regular part of an elaborate stanza composed mainly of shorter verses. As early as the days of *The Shepheards Calendar* we find him testing the value of the alexandrine as the first line of an elaborate stanza employed in his elegy to Dido (*November*). He made occasional use of it as the final line of his own peculiar sonnet-form. (See the *Amoretti*, nos. 10 and 45, and, among those prefixed to *The Faërie Queene: To the Earl of Ormond, To Lord Grey, To Raleigh, To the Countess of Pembroke, and To all the gracious and beautifull Ladies in the Court.*) He used it for the refrain of each stanza in the *Epithalamion*. All that the Spenserian stanza is, then, is the *ababbcbcb* form with an alexandrine added. This is all familiar enough to many, but the frequent errors in text-books seem to make a clear statement necessary here. Now the method of the Fletchers was simply to take, as Spenser did, a current stanza form, the rhyme-royal, the *ottava rima*, the *ababcc* stanza, and add a final alexandrine.

the little pipe that sang of the seductions of "Norfolk maids and Ida Crue" after a long struggle, which is duly set forth in one of his *Piscatorie Eglogs*. None of these more subjective poems are of particular interest to us in this study. We may fairly begin with Fletcher's earliest printed religious poem, *The Appolyonists*, published in 1627.

*The Locusts* or *Appolyonists* is practically a free paraphrase and expansion of Phineas Fletcher's Latin poem, the *Locustae*, into English stanzas made in imitation of Spenser by an addition of a final alexandrine to the regular *ottava rima*. Fletcher's utter extravagance, relieved now and again by flashes of vivid power, is more adequately represented in the turbulent rhetoric of the Latin verses, especially in the magnificent speech made by Satan to his cohorts in Hell, the fierce scorn of which was certainly an inspiration to Milton. But the English expansion is naturally more Spenserian and falls more definitely within our province. The allegorical description of Sin is compounded of Spenser's *Error* and *Duessa*, and stands midway between the allegories of *The Faërie Queene* and of *Paradise Lost*.

In the first canto of Fletcher's poem Hell's pursuivants come with dreadful noise to their domain where the gates are opened by friends below. The porter is Sin, shapeless, foul, deformed, "of that first woman and th' old serpent bred." Yet to some she appears beautiful and Fletcher, tempted in true Spenserian fashion to dilate on the deceitful loveliness of Sin, gives a sensuous description of her allurements. Despair (a woman, but very similar to Spenser's male figure), sits close by Sin. In the entrance dwell also Sickness, Languor, Horror, and other figures similar to those whom Mammon showed to Spenser's Sir Guyon before the mouth of Hell and similar to those in Milton's *In Quintum Novembris*, a poem which might be regarded in some respects as a youthful study for his *Paradise Lost*. Fletcher then tells us how Satan rises to deliver a fiery speech. Earth is smiling in peace. Superstition and Ignorance fly before Truth and Religion. England especially flourishes. Virginia, which belonged to us, is lost. Arm yourselves against Earth.



“Dare we with Heaven and not with Earth to fight?”

Tumult reigns in the council. Equivocus, a prototype of Milton's wily Belial, rises to speak. Fletcher's readers are fairly launched by this crafty demon's speech into a review of contemporary events. We read a violent attack on the Catholic Church which evidently owes quite as much to the first book of *The Faërie Queene* as to Fletcher's own animus. Spenser's allegorical vituperation—Duessa, or Falsehood and Catholicism, who leads Holiness away from his love Una, or Truth, to the House of Pride where dwell the Seven Deadly Sins; Kirkrapine, the villain who stalks through the forest to the squalid abode where he lives in lust with Abessa, or Superstition, the daughter of Blind Devotion; the giant Orgoglio, who stands for the worldly pride of a corrupt church in temporal power, paramour of Duessa whom he clothes in scarlet and mounts on a misshapen beast like the Whore of Babylon—all this distempered fancy fires Fletcher in his intemperate abuse. Equivocus laments the unmasking of the Church of Rome which is described, as Spenser describes Duessa stripped of her false beauty, in foul language that follows Spenser almost verbatim.<sup>8</sup> When lustful Rome was stripped of her scarlet ornaments, says Equivocus, then her friends fell away from her. Who helped the demons then to make her seem fair again? The Jesuits. Let us employ their aid once more. Let us rush to arms and England will fall.

“With that the bold blacke Spirit invades the Day,  
And Heav'n and Light and Lord of both defies.  
All Hell run out and sooty flags display,  
A foul deformed rout.”

Most of the evil spirits scatter through Russia, Greece, Spain, and elsewhere. Alone Equivocus goes to Rome.

“There that stale purple whore in glorious maske  
Of holy Mother Church he mumming spies,  
Dismounting from her seven-headed beast  
Inviting all with her bare painted breast  
They suck, steep, swell, and burst with that envenom'd feast.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Fletcher, canto 1, st. 29. Compare Spenser, bk. 1, c. 8, sts. 45 sq.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Spenser, *The Faërie Queene*, 1, 7, 16-17:

The good fishers of Jordan, now enjoying Heaven's bliss, are supplanted by a crew of idle rascals. For them a great Fisher builds a Babel to Heaven, enlarges his seas and subjects. His tower walls, which are described like Spenser's House of Pride, "seeme porphyrr faire" but are really "base lome."<sup>10</sup> The portal seems far off; the lights are false. There sits dull Ignorance, a loathly dame.<sup>11</sup> Beside her sit her two children: he, called Errour, begot by Hate of Truth, she, called Superstition, falsely called Devotion.<sup>12</sup> These two store the world with an incestuous brood. The usher of the vast hall is loosest Liberty, its waiters Lusts, its caterer Vain Expense, its bedmakers Ease, Sloth, and soft, wanton Sense, its steward Gluttonie, its high-chamberlain perfumed Lechery, like the creatures who wait upon Pride in *The Faërie Queene*.<sup>13</sup> Equivocus poisons the Pope's mind. Plots are laid, among which the worst is that of Guy Fawkes who has been nursed by Rome on wolfish milk. But God, always watchful, calls an eagle to warn the council at London. Fawkes is seized and Rome and Spain lament. The poem ends with an apostrophe and prayer to God.

From *The Purple Island* Fletcher still claims some honor and something not unlike notoriety. One is forced to admire, if with a smile, the astounding ingenuity with which Fletcher constructed allegorical poetry, almost always clever, sometimes of rare beauty, out of the physiology of the human body. As his

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"From that day forth Duessa was his [Orgoglio's] deare,  
And highly honourd in his haughty eye;

He gave her gold and purple pall to weare,"  
and a monstrous beast, more terrible than the Hydra,

"For seven great heads out of his body grew,"  
to ride upon. Compare also the brood of Errour (*The Faërie Queene*, 1, 1, 25-26), who suck the venom of their dead mother till they burst.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *The Faërie Queene*, 1, 4, 4-5:

"A stately Pallace built of squared bricke,  
Which cunningly was without mortar laid,  
Whose wals were high, but nothing strong nor thick  
And golden foile all over them displaid."

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *The Faërie Queene*, 1, 8, 30 sq., Ignaro, porter of Orgoglio's castle, a childish old man.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *The Faërie Queene*, 1, 3, 18, "Abessa, daughter of Coreeca slow," that is, Superstition, daughter of Blind Devotion.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *The Faërie Queene*, 1-4, *passim*, but particularly sts. 43 sq.

point of departure in *The Apollyonists* was mainly from the first book of *The Faërie Queene*, here the description of the Castle of Alma (the soul), in the second book of the same poem, was doubtless Fletcher's most influential source. In the ninth canto Spenser allegorized the human body, which is the House of Alma, more elaborately than one can endure without a laugh. The bulwarks of the House of Alma are the five senses. Its cook, Concoction, and his abode, the stomach, are described with a fidelity which one could well wish less conscientious. In a tower of Alma's castle dwell Fancy, Memory, and Common-Sense, a conceit which we shall find Fletcher unblushingly imitating in great detail when it falls to his lot to describe the human head. The attacks of a motley crew of Vices on the bulwarks of sense gave Fletcher a suggestion for his marshalling and battle of the Virtues and Vices. Spenser's imitator, lost in his fetish-worship, multiplied details and made a complete *reductio ad absurdum* of his master's allegory. But Fletcher's poem is not a mere slavish imitation or merely an ingenious expansion of the episode in *The Faërie Queene*. Its exuberant stanzas abound in splendid and original bursts that make one feel querulous with Time who denies their enjoyment to all but a few patient students of seventeenth century literature. In *The Apollyonists* Fletcher left the shadow of his teacher to limn with bold strokes an imposing and noble picture of the rebel Lucifer and his hosts. In *The Purple Island* his legions of Virtues and Vices are sometimes strikingly independent of many possible models in *The Faërie Queene*. As an example of Fletcher's own fancy, tinged only with the general quality of the Spenserian pictures, we may anticipate by quoting the artificial but beautiful lines which describe Tapinus or Humility:

“Next Tapinus, whose sweet, though lowly grace  
All other higher than himself esteem'd;  
He himself priz'd things as mean and base,  
Which yet in others great and glorious seem'd  
All ill due debt, good undeserv'd he thought;  
His heart a low-rooft house, but sweetly wrought  
Where God Himself would dwell, though he it dearly bought.

"So choicest drugs in meanest shrubs are found;  
 So precious gold in deepest centre dwells;  
 So sweetest violets trail on lowly ground;  
 So richest pearls ly clos'd in vilest shells;  
 So lowest dales we let at highest rates;  
 So creeping strawberries yield daintiest eates

The Highest highly loves the low, the loftie hates."

It is Senser's cloth-of-gold sown more stiff with extravagant fancies and antitheses, but it has its own quaint charm.

*The Purple Island* begins with a concourse of shepherds who enduce Thirsil, after some difficulty, to sing. To Christ, the great prince of shepherds, he gives lofty praise and then speaks of God's creation of man. God took purple dust and made "the little Isle of man or Purple Island."

Forthwith we find ourselves lost in a most astounding museum of fancy. The general fabric of this island is of bone, gristle, and flesh which is described as a curious stuff like undivided brick, soft, yet durable and concealing the rougher frame. The veins are a thousand brooks in azure channels. The whole isle has three kingdoms ruled by the liver, heart, and brain. The mouth is a cave with twice sixteen porters<sup>14</sup> and the tongue, "a groom with wondrous volubilitie."<sup>15</sup> An astounding journey over the road of the alimentary canal brings us to where

"Below dwells in this Citie's market-place  
 The Island's common cook, Concoction."<sup>16</sup>

Having been educated conscientiously in all the functions of the stomach we are conducted to the kingdom of Hepar, the liver, where the steward of the whole isle is placed. So the poet, with a desperately grave face, guides us through the realms of the heart until, with the allegorizing of the head, we find him pillaging

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *The Faërie Queene*, 2, 9, 26:

"And round about the porch on every syde  
Twice sixteen warders satt, all armed bright."

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *The Faërie Queene*, 2, 9, 25:

"Within the barbiean a porter sate,  
Day and night keeping watch and ward;  
His larumbell might lowd and wyde be hard,  
When cause requyrd."

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *The Faërie Queene*, 2, 9, 31:

"The maister cooke was cald Concoction."

For further parallels see: *The Purple Island*, 3, 36; *The Faërie Queene*, 2, 9, 30 sq., and *The Purple Island*, 3, 43.

almost entire stanzas from the description of the House of Alma. In the head dwell the counsellors of Intellect, the Lord of the Isle. The five lesser counsellors are the Five Senses. The three privy counsellors are, as in the House of Alma, Common-Sense, Phantastes, and Eumnestes. Common-Sense,

"Of middle years and seemly personage  
Father of laws, the rule of wrong and right,"<sup>17</sup>

dwells in the midst of the high tower.

"Not those seven Sages might him parallel,  
Nor he whom Pythian maid did whilome tell  
To be the wisest man that on our earth did dwell,"<sup>18</sup>

Phantastes is "The next that in the castle's front is plac't."

" . . . His yeares are fresh and green,  
His visage old, his face too much defac't  
With ashes pale, his eyes deep sunken been,"<sup>19</sup>

The third is Eumnestes, father of memory, very old, worn of body but fresh of mind:<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> In *The Faërie Queene*, 2, 9, 53, the wall of Common-Sense's room has pictures "of magistrates. of courts, of tribunals."

<sup>18</sup> Compare Spenser's general description of the three (st. 48):

"Not he, whom Greece, the nourse of all good arts,  
By Phaebus doome, the wisest thought alive,  
Might be compar'd to these by many parts."

<sup>19</sup> *The Faërie Queene*, st. 52:

"Emongst them all sate he which wonned there,  
That hight Phantastes by his nature trew,  
A man of yeares yet fresh, as mote appear  
Of swarth complexion and of crabbed hew,  
That him full of melancholy did shew.  
Bent, hollow beetle browes, sharpe staring eyes."

In *The Purple Island*, Phantastes has "Often thoughts and never slakt intention." In *The Faërie Queene*, he "never idle was ne once would rest a whit." In *The Purple Island*, through his brain

"Thousand thin forms, and idle fancies flit;

Which in the world had never being yet."

In *The Faërie Queene* his chamber is painted with

"Infinite shapes of things dispersed then  
Some such as in the world were never yit  
Such as in idle fantasies doe flit."

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Spenser's Eumnestes, st. 55:

"And therein sat an old, old man halfe blind  
And all decrepit in his feeble corse,  
Yet lively vigour rested in his mind."

And cf. *The Purple Island*, st. 50:

"Therefore his body weak his eyes halfe blinde,  
But minde, more fresh and strong;—ah better fate!"

"Well he recalls Nimrods first tyrannie  
And Babel's pride daring the loftie skie;"<sup>21</sup>

Like his body is his chamber:

"And as his carcase, so his house declin'd;  
Yet were the walls of firm and able state;  
. . . . .  
Onely on him a nimble page attends  
Who when in ought the aged Grandsire sends,  
With swift, yet backward steps his helping aidance lends."'<sup>22</sup>

The island's queen is Voletta, the Will, more beautiful than Gloriana, but often caught in the toils of vice and thereby causing her husband, Intellect, sad wars and misfortunes. Synteresis, Conscience, is her faithful counsellor. When Voletta disregards this attendant's warnings, a "sad-fair maid Repentance" holds her fainting. Just now she is prostrated with grief over a recent error and the Vices are marshalling, inspired with a new hope of razing the Castle of Intellect.

In this latter part of the poem, in which the Vices and Virtues gather and hold battle, Fletcher departs somewhat more freely from the influence of Spenser. But it is evident that Fletcher used the denizens of the House of Pride to some extent and found material elsewhere in *The Faërie Queene* for other Vices. Thus Caro, the Flesh, is another one of his morbid imitations of Duessa unmasked. But when the last jeer has been cast by the painful seeker of parallel passages, one can but admire the bold strokes of originality that flash out capriciously

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *The Faërie Queene*, st. 56:

"The warres he well remembred of King Nine,  
Of old Assaracus, and Inachus divine."

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *The Faërie Queene*, st. 55:

"The chamber seemed ruinous and old,  
. . . . .  
Yet were the wals, that did the same uphold,  
Right firm and strong."

And st. 58:

"A little boy did on him still attend,  
To reach, whenever he for ought did send."

*Lingua, or the Combat of the Tongue and the Five Senses for Superiority* (1657), an anonymous comedy, may be mentioned here in passing as using the same allegorical material as that in Spenser's House of Alma and certainly deriving as much from Spenser as from Phineas Fletcher. But the work is of no importance for this study.

in many places. Parthenia (Chastity in the single life), is, to be sure, derived from Spenser's Belpheobe and Britomart. But Spenser himself would have admired these lines:

“Her armour seem'd a goodly garden green,  
Where thousand spotless lilies freshly blew;  
And on her shield the 'lone bird might be seen,  
The Arabian bird, shining in colours new;  
Itself unto itself was onely mate;  
Ever the same, but new in newer date;  
And underneath was writ, 'Such is chaste single state.'"

“Thus hid in arms, she seem'd a goodly knight,  
And fit for any warlike exercise;  
And when she list lay down her armour bright,  
And back resume her peaceful maiden's guise;  
The fairest maid she was, that ever yet.  
Prison'd her locks within a golden net,  
Or let them waving hang, with roses fair beset.”

It is unnecessary to illustrate Fletcher's methods by a further enumeration of these personages. The ensuing battle is managed with nice allegorical but rather doubtful moral propriety. First Parthenia jousts with Porneios (Fornication), and overthrows him. Aselges (Lasciviousness), is bent on revenge but falls before the warlike maid. Other rascals swarm around her but she defends herself valiantly till the Old Dragon sends False Delight, in friendly attire, who wounds her in the side. Agneia (Chastity in married life), and her husband Eucrates (Temperance), ride to her rescue. Soon there is a general mêlée in which Fletcher's allegory works with the preciseness of a machine. It is a rare puppet show, like the first part of the battle of Roncesvalles in the *Chanson*. Often the Vices pretend to yield and then wound their conquerors treacherously. When the Virtues have almost won the field the Old Dragon suddenly marshals a new loathsome crew: Hamartia (Sin), Despair, like a dead man, with a raven on his crest, armed with ropes and knives,<sup>23</sup> Time, and Death. They work havoc, though Faith, Experience, and Hope rally the drooping Virtues. Suddenly an Angel with

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Spenser's Despair, 1, 9, whose hollow eyes look deadly dull. A ghastly owl perches on his cave. He tempts his victims to suicide with ropes and knives.

a silver trumpet drops into their midst. The Old Dragon knows his doom but rushes fiercely against his foe in blinding arms. He is wounded and bound. Now is the time of festival. Eclecta, long widowed, welcomes her bridegroom, Christ, who is described with all the pagan rapture of the *Canticles*, or as an Italian poet of the Renaissance would limn an Adonis:

"His locks like raven's plumes, or shining jet  
Falls down in curls along his ivory neck;  
Within their circlets hundred Graces set,  
And with love-knots their comely hangings deck:  
His mighty shoulders, like that giant swain,  
All heav'n and earth, and all in both sustain;  
Yet knows no weariness, nor feels oppressing pain."

We are left not quite certain whether we ought to regard Fletcher as a charlatan or as a true poet. It would be impossible to give space to a complete enumeration of Fletcher's echoes. There are many formal tricks, too, which the zealous pupil is no less assiduous in reproducing. We have seen that Fletcher is indefatigable in his experiments with variations of the Spenserian stanza. But he never tries the more difficult stanza itself. And a study of his use of the alexandrine, a dangerous line for English poets, does not add much to our faith in him. Various cheap and easy devices, violent antitheses, elaborate play on words, are made use of to make the final lines prominent.<sup>24</sup> For

<sup>24</sup> For example:

"Whereof three noble are, and thinnè, three thiek and vile."  
"All day he rent receives; returns it all the day."  
"Whose death she all too late, too soon, too much repented."  
"To give an end to griefe till endless griefs did end her."  
"So spring some dawns of joy, so sits the night of sorrow."  
"Poorly—poore man—he liv'd; poorly—poore man—he di'd."

Other members of the School of the Fletchers resort to the same device. Here are a few examples taken at random from hundreds equally typical.

"How worthily he died, that died unworthily."  
"That bloody man to save, man's Saviour shed his blood."  
"Enjoying but one joy—but one of all joyes best."  
"That all might come to see, and all might see that came."  
—Giles Fletcher.  
"So fast to spend the time that spends your time so fast."  
"And fit love to reward, and with love be rewarded."  
"Thou wilt not love to live, unless thou live to love."

—Brittain's *Ida*.

"How sorrowe, joye, and joye again did sorrowe close."  
—Thomas Robinson.



Fletcher had learned from his master that each alexandrine in a perfect stanza must be memorable to bring about the supreme close. But he did not, like Spenser, have an inexhaustible treasury of fancy and sensuous music to draw from. The School of the Fletchers indulged too often in alexandrines both rhetorical and halting. Almost invariably a very heavy caesura, in the middle of the line, divides it unpleasantly and destroys the rich flow. But Fletcher can, on occasion, display real imagination and write verses heavy with rich music. And he is a poet of distinct merit when he is bearing the torch for Milton as he conceives his gloomy and majestic picture of Satan. Most unerringly is he a poet when he sings, with no small share of his master's gentle sensuousness, of Tapinus and Parthenia.

#### GILES FLETCHER

It is probable that Phineas Fletcher was at work on his *Purple Island* at the same time that Giles was singing of *Christs Victorie and Triumph in Heaven, and Earth, over, and after Death*. Both poets borrowed freely from each other and indulged in considerable mutual praise.<sup>25</sup> There is, indeed, a reference at the close of the *Christ* to the last episode in *The Purple Island*, the marriage of Christ and Electa:

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“So I my best beloved's am; as he is mine.”

—Francis Quarles.

Of course Spenser is not entirely innocent of such devices; e.g., *The Faerie Queene*, 1, 9, 9:

“Which still wex old in woe, whiles woe still wexeth new.”

But Spenser's lapses of this sort are remarkably few considering the immense demands of his huge poem on his metrical resources and the many artificial excesses of his time.

<sup>25</sup> Space will not permit a detailed account of this. For an example of verbal similarity, compare Giles Fletcher:

“How may a worrne, that crawls along the dust

Clamber the azure mountaines thrown so high,”

and Phineas Fletcher:

“How shall a worm, on dust that crawls and feeds

Climb to th' empyreall court, where these States reign?”

Both poets give an elaborate picture of the debate of Justice and Mercy over mankind before God which abounds in similarities. See also the descriptions of Christ in both poems which are almost identical and which seem to derive ultimately from *The Song of Songs*. For Phineas Fletcher's eulogy of his brother see *Preliminary Verses* for Giles Fletcher's *Christ*. Giles Fletcher's panegyric rejoinder is noted in the text below:

"But my greene Muse, hiding her younger head  
Under old Chamus' flaggy banks, . . . . .

Dares not those high amours and love-sick songs assay."

Giles Fletcher, we see, was not a love-poet despite his sensuous picture of the bower of Vaine-Delight. Though his one important poem was published in 1610, perhaps before his brother had bidden farewell to the little pipe which emulated the youthful love-plaints of Colin, he is austere sometimes to the point of asceticism. He has a vatic fervor that places the *Christ* among the greatest religious poems of the period.

The *Christ* begins with a noble and impressive allegory of the debate of Justice and Mercy before God. Justice has the winged lightning for her Mercury. About her throng pale Sickness, "with kercher'd head," Famine, bloodless Care, Age, Fear, and many more. Justice leans her bosom on two stony tables. Her speech inflames the Heavenly Hierarchies to destroy corrupted mankind. But Mercy steps forward like the sun from the clouds. Upon her breast sleeps Delight. She pleads for man, especially since Christ is now wandering on earth; and her efforts are successful.

On earth Christ is dwelling in the wilderness. Satan comes as an aged hermit, just as Archimago comes to the Red Cross Knight in *The Faërie Queene*. Under pretence of leading Christ to his hermitage, Satan leads him to the bower of Despair and we come to Fletcher's superb borrowing from *The Faërie Queene*, his most important imitation. Headly condemned this passage as "a curious instance of plagiarism." Grosart, the Fletchers' militant champion, protests angrily with some of his characteristic rhetoric: "Who but a man with nose for 'plagiarism' as eager-nostrilled as that of your orthodox hunter after 'heresy' will deem these of any moment."<sup>26</sup> He asserts that two lines were intended as a quotation. But many lines which Grosart chooses to ignore are lifted almost bodily out of Spenser.

<sup>26</sup> Grosart, burning with zeal to establish the striking originality of the Fletchers, overlooks the numerous parallels I am noting, but cites scores of passages to prove Milton's indebtedness to the Fletchers that would puzzle even the "eager-nostrilled" Headly to appreciate.

My own notion is that the whole quarrel is futile and that, although Fletcher's indebtedness amounts to liberal borrowing, he has created a picture which is hardly less impressive after we know its source. Christ comes to the baleful bower,

" . . . The mouth of that infernall cave,  
That gaping stood, all commers to devoure."

About the den are venomous herbs and "ragged trees."<sup>27</sup> Everywhere

"Dead bones and skulls were cast and bodies hanged wear."<sup>28</sup>

Here dwells Despair.

"His black uncombed lockes dishevelled fell  
About his face; through which, as brands of Hell,  
Sunk in his skull, his staring eyes did glowe,  
That made him deadly looke. . . .

His cloathes were ragged clouts, with thornes pind fast."<sup>29</sup>

Fletcher does not attempt to reproduce Despair's subtle eloquence in *The Faërie Queene* that nearly ruins the Red Cross Knight. Christ steals away and flies with Satan to where

" . . . Presumption her pavilion spread  
Over the temple the bright starres among."

Here, too, all temptations prove futile and angels bring the Saviour to a mountain-top at first snowy. Here he endures the supreme temptation. In the description which follows, a famous passage in the *Christ*, everyone who has read Spenser's magnificent outburst on the Bower of Bliss will see both the general indebtedness and the originality of Fletcher.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Spenser, 1, 9, 34:

"And all about old stocks and stubs of trees  
Whereon nor fruite nor leaf was ever seene,  
Did hang upon the ragged rocky knees."

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *The Faërie Queene*, 1, 9, 34:

"On which had many wretches hanged beene,  
Whose carcases were scattered on the greene."

<sup>29</sup> *The Faërie Queene*, st. 35:

"His griesie lockes, long growen and unbound,  
Disordered hong about his shoulders round,  
And hid his face; through which his hollow eyne  
Lookt deadly dull, and stared as astound;"

and st. 36:

"His garments nought but many ragged clouts,  
With thornes together pind and patched was."

"All suddenly the hill his snowe devours,  
 In lieu whereof a goodly garden grew  
 As if the snowe had melted into flow'rs  
 Which their sweet breath in subtile vapours threw,  
 That all about perfumed spirits flew:  
 For what as ever might aggrate the sense,  
 In all the world, or please the appetite,  
 Here it was poured out in lavish affluence.

"For in all these<sup>30</sup> some one thing most did growe,  
 But in this one grew all things else beside;  
 For sweet Varietie herselfe did throw  
 To every banke; here all the ground she dide  
 In lillie white; there pinks emblazed wide;  
 And damask't all the earth; and here shee shed  
 Blew violets, and there came roses red;  
 And every sight the yielding sense, as captive led.

"The garden like a lady faire was cut,  
 That lay as if she slumber'd in delight,  
 And to the open skies her eyes did shut;  
 The azure fields of heav'n wear 'sembled right  
 In a large round, set with the flow'r's of light,  
 The flow're-de-luce, and the round sparks of deaw,  
 That hung upon the azure leaves, did shew,  
 Like twinkling starrs, that sparkle in th' eavning blew.

"Upon a hillie banke her head shee cast,  
 On which the bowre of Vaine-delight was built;  
 White and red roses for her face was plac't,  
 And for her tresses marigolds wear spilt;  
 Them broadly shee displaid, like flaming guilt,  
 Till in the ocean the glad day wear drown'd;  
 Then up again her yellow lockes she wound,  
 And with greene filletts in their prettie calls them bound."

The quaint, stiff extravagance with which Fletcher strives to outdo his master's gorgeousness is here only delightful. Both poets have fountains adorned with naked, wanton boys. Both have groves where branches twine in drunken abandon. Both Spenser and Fletcher have beds of roses where naked women disport. The "faire witch," so called by both poets, has a herd of enchanted beasts, once men, in both poems. In Fletcher

<sup>30</sup> Viz: Ida, Tempe, etc., which Fletcher says cannot be compared with this garden.

Ambition, too, sits enthroned. In Spenser Guyon finds a similar Ambition sitting in state in Mammon's cave. Christ hears someone sing a voluptuous lay like that with which one of Acrasia's damsels greets Sir Guyon's ears:

"See see the flowers that belowe,  
Now as fresh as morning blowe;  
And of all the Virgin rose,  
Everything doth passe away  
Thear is danger in delay  
Come, come gather then the rose."<sup>31</sup>

Above all Panglorie sits enthroned, crowned with her golden hair and a garland of rosebuds. In one hand she holds a silver wand; in the other, a hollow globe of glass whose colors, like those of the rainbow, are always vanishing. Christ dispels her enchantments and she flees to Hell. Angels bring a banquet to the Lord.

From now on Fletcher ceases to employ allegory to any extent. The poem gains distinctly in earnest eloquence, greater vigor, and nobler simplicity. Christ passes over the Cedron singing to his death.

"So downe the silver streames of Eridan,  
On either side bank't with a lilly wall,  
Whiter than both, rides the triumphant swan,  
And sings his dirge and death, and propheties his fall."

The betrayal and crucifixion are described with an eremite's ecstacy and with occasional incursions into the realms of grotesque horror.<sup>32</sup> All earth mourns. But the second dawn is

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *The Faërie Queene*, 2, 12, sts. 74 sq:

"The whiles some one did chaunt this lovely lay:  
Ah! see the Virgin Rose, how sweetly shee  
Doth first peepe forth in bashfull modestie,  
That fairer seemes the less ye see her may,  
Lo! see soone after how more bold and free  
Her bared bosom she doth broad display;  
Lo! see soone after how she fades and falls away.

"Gather therefore the Rose whilst yet is prime  
For soone comes age that will her pride deflowre."

<sup>32</sup> The curious may compare the Devil here with Errour in *The Faërie Queene* and the Old Dragon in *The Purple Island*.

an ecstasy of light. The flowers spring luxuriantly to welcome their Lord. Triumphant from his harrowing of Hell, Christ returns to earth and thence ascends into Heaven. With a real rapture the poet visions the splendors of Paradise. He rejoices in the love of Egliseth for Christ. But he is too humble to sing of the great marriage. That is reserved for Thirsil. And with this modest note the noble poem closes.

### “BRITAIN’S IDA”

In 1628 Thomas Walkley published a fanciful version of the story of Venus and Anchises called *Brittain’s Ida*, “written by that renowned poet Edmond Spenser.” Its authorship remained unquestioned for nearly two centuries, although it seems incredible to a student of Spenser that its apocryphal nature should have remained so long unnoticed. It is in the stanza of *Christ’s Victorie* (*ababbccC*), and is either the work of one of the Fletchers, more probably of Phineas, or of a member of their school. Grosart sought to fix its authorship on Phineas Fletcher by the useless and worn-out method of piling up parallels with the poet’s established works (as if most imitators, especially of this period, did not furnish parallels a plenty), and by certain more convincing repentant references to the looser poems of youth. He has but increased the probability at best.

The poem is a lovely work of youth, sensual, to be sure, but almost too delicate for Phineas Fletcher at any period of his life. It is in six brief cantos. The first simply introduces Anchises.

“In Ida vale (who knows not Ida vale)  
When harmless Troy yet felt not Grecian spite,”

dwelt a hundred shepherds, of whom the most beautiful by far was Anchises. Canto two is a description of the Garden of Delight, in imitation of Spenser’s Bower of Bliss. Here Venus dwelt and here Anchises came on a day when he was tired from the chase. From the grove came “dainty music.” Thither half fearful, half hopeful he stole. Some voice sang a lay like that which Guyon heard in the Bower of Bliss. Anchises entered

and saw Venus reclining on a bed of lillies, clothed in a veil of thinnest silk. Anchises swooned. Venus awaking almost thought she saw Adonis once more dying at her feet. She revived the youth with tender care. By her surpassing beauty he knew that she could be no other than the Goddess of Love. Ardently he pleaded to be admitted into her service. The gracious goddess granted his suit, gave him a bow and arrows, and placed him with the pretty Graces from whom he won great love. But he nursed a growing passion for Venus in secret until one day she overheard his complaints and begged him to tell her the cause. Falteringly he disclosed his longing and, begging for a single kiss, he won her love. His happiness was long; but one day he rashly disclosed his bliss to woods and heaven and earth:

“That Jove upon him downe his thunder darted  
Blasting his splendent face, and all his beauty swarted.”

And here the poet steps in quaintly in his own person, blames Anchises for blabbing, and avows his own powers of secrecy would his obdurate mistress but yield. The poem shows a close dependence on Spenser and a fluent mastery of his sensuous cadences, though the rhetorical alexandrine creeps in at times. It is a delightful piece of youthful lawlessness.

#### THOMAS ROBINSON

About 1620, Thomas Robinson, who has suffered more obscurity than many worse poets of his period, wrote his *Life and Death of Mary Magdalene* in the stanza of Giles Fletcher's *Christ* and enrolled himself in the School of the Fletchers. The influence of the *Christ*, in fact, is quite as marked as that of *The Faërie Queene*. Robinson begins with a quaint paradoxical statement of the argument exactly in the manner of Giles Fletcher's prelude:

"The death of her that was but newly borne:  
 The birth of her that long agoe was dead:  
 The life of her whom heaven and earth did scorne:  
 Her beawty, that was erst debellished:  
 How snowy white inveild the crimson red,  
 And yet the lily sprange unto the rose,  
 Under his spiny fortresse to repose;  
 How sorrowe, joye, and joye againe did sorrowe close.<sup>33</sup>

"This be the duty of my oaten reed."

What reader having sped through these astounding lines would not hasten on in search of the wonders that the poet promises from his humble oaten stops?

The narrative begins with an account of the gorgeous Palace of Pleasure where dwelt

"Amorous, younge, faire, slender Aphrodite.  
 . . . . .  
 A goulden bowle in her right hand shee bore,  
 Wherein all pleasure and delight were bred,"

as Panglorie, in the *Christ*, holds a hollow glass globe which symbolizes man's vain pleasures. Two ladies held the train of Aphrodite, "Plumpe, pursive Luxury, and quainter Pride." Gilded Flattery supported her right hand, Wantonnesse her left. "Foolish dame Laughter" painted her eyelids. There too were Idleness, Jealousy, Inconstancie, and "a thousand graceless Graces." A song, like those always sung in these Bowers of Bliss, allured.

"This said, a thousand prostitute delights,  
 Flewe up and downe the courts as bright as day."

Gluttonie and Bacchus were invited to the feast. After an orgy all dispersed into the arbors. Some were turned to beasts.

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. the opening stanzas of the *Christ*:

"The birth of Him that no beginning knewe,  
 Yet gives beginning to all that are borne,  
 And how the Infinite farre greater grewe,  
 By growing lesse, and how the rising Morne,  
 That shot from heav'n, did backe to heav'n retourne;  
 The obsequies of Him that could not die  
 And death of life, ende of eternitie  
 How worthily he died that died unworthily;" etc.



Among the revellers the most beautiful was Mary Magdelene. From many rivals she chose the strongest, one who obtained her after a bloody contest. They went into a garden of flowers like those of Spenser strewed at the feet of Elisa.

“The Damaske-roses heere were brought a bed,  
Just opposite the Lillie of the Vale,  
The woody Primrose and the pretty Paunce  
The Pineke, the Daffodill and Chevisaunce  
All in Perfumed sets their fragrant heads advance.”<sup>34</sup>

Heaven, beholding, sent Syneide (Good Conscience), daughter of light. She went to Mary, admonished her, and wounded her with a goad. Mary, however, soon went back to her ways of lust. Then Heaven was angered and sent a tormenting Conscience, “a dreary hagge,” who came with other furies. The snakes of Conscience twined around Mary. Sorrow and Care ruled her. She was carried to the Cave of Melancholy, Robinson’s contribution to the Spenserian Despair-poetry. Near the tarn was a steep path leading to Hell. Nemesis hastened thither and called up seven fiery spirits to torture Mary, who wandered distraught through a great desert. But new hope dawned. Christ was approaching. He saw Mary and cast out the evil spirits. Syneide returned to the penitent and bade her go to the Palace of Wisdom. It was surrounded by rich forests like fragrant Lebanon.

“Pomegranates sweet, and saffron there contend;  
Spiknard and Camphire and browne Cinnamon.”

Wisdom’s palace stands on a hill because her glory is high; on a rock because she is constant. Thorns grow before it because it is difficult of approach. Though the poet’s own glosses refer

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Spenser’s *Song to Elisa* (*April*).

“Bring hether the pineke and purple cullambine  
With gelliflowres;  
Bring coronations, and sops in wine,  
Worne of paramoures;  
Strowe me the ground with daffadowndillies,  
And cowslips, and kingcups, and loved lillies;  
The pretie pawnee  
And the chevisaunce  
Shall match with the fayre flowre delice.”

throughout to the *Wisdom of Solomon*, his more substantial indebtedness to Spenser's episode of the House of Holinesse is unquestionable. As in Spenser, "watchful Humility still kept the dore" and brought Mary before beautiful Wisdom. In the Apocryphal book the only allegorical element is the vague personification of Wisdom. In Robinson's poem Mary was led to Repentance, a woman clothed in sackcloth who continually weeps. Repentance, in *The Faërie Queene*, bathed the Red Cross Knight in "salt water smarting sore" after he had been scourged by "bitter Penance" and "sharpe Remorse." Mary repented and was soothed by Conscience, as the Red Cross Knight was comforted by Charissa. Robinson's poem closes with an account of Mary's devotion to Christ, her lamentation at the cross, and her meeting with Christ after the resurrection.

#### FRANCIS QUARLES

Francis Quarles (1592-1644) should be noted as member of the School of the Fletchers. For Phineas Fletcher he had the highest admiration. He prefixed commendatory verses to *The Purple Island*, hailing its author as the "Spencer of this age." And he was very partial to the variations of the Spenserian stanzas employed by the Fletchers. He added two similar variations to the group of stanzas in regular pentameters and he experimented further by varying the length of the lines. Most of his Spenserian variations appear in *Emblemes* and *Hieroglyphikes of the life of Man*, groups of poems in which he took a Biblical quotation as a text and either expanded it into a poem in the same mood or wrote a sort of homily in verse on thoughts suggested by it. Probably he was led to vary Fletcher's stanzas occasionally, by the introduction of some shorter lines, from a desire to make his stanzas more suitable to the mood of some of his texts. The *Emblems* seem to have achieved considerable popularity and in fact do contain about all his best work. Almost all those which are based on quotations from the *Canticles* are at least worthy of the Fletchers and rise above the deadly mediocrity of the body of his work. Their content is

seldom notably Spenserian, but a few significant verses may be noted as containing material at least familiar to Spenser and his followers. Thus in one Emblem (Book 5, Emblem 3), on the passage in the *Canticles* (2:5), "Stay me with flowers, and comfort me with apples for I am sick with love," he contributes a flower passage and writes in a manner perhaps vaguely reminiscent of the *Epithalamion*.

"Virgins, tuck up your silken laps and fill ye  
With the fair wealth of Flora's Magazine;  
The purple violet, and the pale-fac'd lilly;  
The pancy and the organ columbine;  
The flowring thyme, the guilt-boul daffadilly;  
The lowly pink, the lofty eglentine;  
The blushing rose, the queen of flowers and best  
Of Flora's beauty; but above the rest,  
Let Jesse's sovereign flower perfume my qualming breast."

#### JOSEPH BEAUMONT

The illustrious family of Beaumonts furnished their member of the School of the Fletchers in the person of Dr. Joseph Beaumont (1615-1699) whose *Psyche* is the most ponderous of all the ambitious allegories of this group. Beaumont was a placid dreamer who, however, was shrewd enough to avoid the contumely of the howling world. Although he was driven from Cambridge along with his friend Crashaw and other prominent royalists during the troublous times, he contrived to be one who suffered no harm thereby. He occupied several snug positions as pastor and teacher, and discreetly married the daughter of his patron, the Bishop of Ely. His leisure hours were devoted to the production of his unwieldy epic. Spenser's mighty scheme, propounded in the famous letter to Raleigh, was no more heaven-storming. Beaumont linked to the life of Christ an elaborate allegory of Psyche, the soul of man. In 1648 he published his poem in a version said to have been much milder than the one which is now extant. He then devoted himself to putting an edge on the sectarian passages and, in calm certainty of deathless fame, dauntlessly added four cantos to the leviathan.

In 1702 his son, prompted, he tells us, by the demand for the poem, the first edition of which was even then rare, published *Psyche, or Love's Mystery, In Twenty-four Cantos: Displaying the Intercourse Betwixt Christ, and the Soul, The Second Edition, With Corrections throughout and Four new Cantos, never before Printed.*

The *Psyche* begins with a scene in Hell which may be grouped with those of *The Apollyonists*, *Christ's Victorie*, and *Paradise Lost*. With a speech of fiery scorn Satan fills his henchmen with a new spirit of rebellion and lays plots to beguile Psyche. Lust is first despatched against the unsuspecting maiden. She is found feasting with Phylax, the emissary of Christ, who prepares her for her coming danger by a detailed account of Joseph's life and his temptation by Potiphar's wife. Psyche slips out alone, but sage Syneidesis (Conscience), follows. Charis, an old friend, is also on the watch but decides to let Psyche have a severe lesson. Syneidesis falls asleep and Psyche, pursued by a boar, is rescued by a gallant knight, Aphrodisius. Her rescuer, however, proves to be the seductive emissary of Satan who would have ruined her with his lying tongue had not Charis and Phylax intervened. Aphrodisius is bound, and when repentant Psyche is brought back to behold evil unmasked he proves to be a hideous fiend.

Beaumont now describes a rebellion which is in the manner of Spenser's episode of the House of Alma and Phineas Fletcher's *Purple Island*. Psyche's friends murmur against her and meet in an upper chamber of the house whose master is Common-Sense. The maidens Opsis (Sight), Ophresis (Smell), Geusis (Taste), Acœ (Hearing), and Haphe (Touching), all dispute for the supremacy. Opsis begins by describing the wonders of her house in terms of physiological allegory precisely similar to the manner of Phineas Fletcher. She then shows exterior glories, a pageant of the seasons. Here Beaumont derives hints from an analogous scene in the fragmentary seventh book of *The Faërie Queene*. First:

“The Spring marched forth array’d  
 With fragrant Green, whose sweet embroidery  
 In blooms and buds of Virgin smiles display’d  
 A scene of living joys all echoed by  
 Ten thousand Birds, which, perch’d on every Tree  
 Tun’d their soft pipes to Nature’s harmony.”<sup>35</sup>

In the same manner each Sense puts forth her claim, first by physiological allegory, then by presenting a spectacle of the external wonders which she enjoys. The vision which Acœe displays is of special interest because of its elaborate account of Beaumont’s most cherished poets. A grove suddenly springs up. Here Pindar and Flaccus play rival notes. Homer sits on a mountain and Maro echoes his princely voice with tones of equal quality. In slightly lower state admirable Tasso rests,

“Not far from whom, though in a lower clime  
 Yet with a goodly train doth Colin sweep:  
 Though manac’d in thick and peevish Rhymes  
 A decent pace his painful Verse doth keep;  
 Right fairly dress’d were his welfeatured Queen  
 Did not her Mask too much her beauties screen.”

Common-Sense quiets the brawling Senses and advises them to send his sister Fancy to the discontented troop scattered about the Heart. Fancy flies to the Passions and exhorts them to insurrection. They march in array. Psyche, terrified, flees to her inmost fort and sends Logos (Reason), to urge peace. But her advice is spurned and he is imprisoned. Phylax and Charis are nowhere to be seen. Only Thelema (Will), is left. She sallies forth in vengeful mood, but the Passions, by fawning homage and by deceit, lure her to their side. The Passions then send Love, their most subtle champion, to treat with Psyche. He wins her over to their lawlessness. Pride arranges Psyche in gorgeous apparel and the unhappy maid revels and rides far and

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *The Faërie Queene*, 7, 7, 28:

“First lusty Spring, all dight in leaves of flowres  
 That freshly budded and new bloomes did beare  
 (In which a thousand birds had built their bowres,  
 That sweetly sung, to call forth paramours.)”

Beaumont’s descriptions of the other seasons are also very similar to Spenser’s.

wide in a coach of vanities. Syneidesis protests but Psyche shrouds her in a black veil.

From Heaven Christ sees his bride's fall and despatches Phylax and Charis to her aid. Phylax stops her chariot in its mad course. Angry Thelema, the postillion, would drive on, but Phylax shatters the car and chides both Thelema and the more reluctant Psyche to repentance. Pride is shown in Hell and the other passions are glad to submit to Thelema's stern orders. Logos and Syneidesis are freed. Psyche is instructed by the story of Adam and Eve and by a long account of the life of Christ, freely interspersed with allegory, which covers nine cantos.

It seems quite reasonable for Phylax to have supposed that, after his extraordinary biography of Christ, intellectual exhaustion alone would have so completely subdued Psyche's moods for unhealthy explorations that she would present in effect an adamant front to sin. But as soon as he leaves her the busy devil seeks out "a special Fury's den" and despatches the monster against his victim. In short, Psyche is tempted by Heresy and is won over. But Phylax once more intervenes and takes her to her new-found Doctor's tower, to the birthplace of Heretick Sin, where they find

"Swarms of Doors and Cells and Galleries,  
Which by quaint Turnings to and fro did wind."

They come to a room where

"A goodly Crucifix was there displaid,  
Altars were rear'd and reverend Bibles ope,  
By which majestick Liturgies were laid,  
And lofty-tuned Anthems; on the top  
Art plac'd a quire of Angels hovering  
And made the gorgeous Roof all seem to sing."

But at the entrance of Phylax all the falsity becomes apparent.

"Glozing Deceits and handsome Lyes stood there,  
With gentle meek demure Hypocrisy,  
All which in goodly state attended were  
By treacherous Rhetorick and Phylosophy;  
With Syllogisms in rank and file array'd  
Whose hands three-forked massy halberts sway'd."

No doubt the unruly Psyche needed even more persuasion than could come from the disconcerting spectacle of syllogisms in human semblance. So she was shown a long procession of the heretical sects of all ages pressing downward to Death's living fountains.

Beaumont now contributes to the allegorical purgation scenes which Spenser made popular in this age by his description of the penance of the Red Cross Knight in the House of Holinesse. Phylax carries Psyche a fabulous height in his chariot. She is brought to a majestic palace. To enter its first gate she is compelled to bend and shrink. This portal, of transparent crystal, is kept by Sorrow mourning with dishevelled hair and scourging herself continually. After beholding many wonders Psyche is brought before the Queen of the Castle, Ecclesia, the Church and the supreme bride of Christ. In her right hand the stately queen holds the golden key of the Port of Bliss and in her left the iron key which opens the way down to torment. Her maids of honor swarm about her: the sober matron Sanctity, portly Magnanimity with open swelling breasts,<sup>36</sup> and other Spenserian figures. By Truth's embraces Psyche is made whole.<sup>37</sup>

After one more vain attempt Satan resorts to a supreme trial.

"Thus came the monster to his dearest Place  
On Earth, a Palace wondrous large and high,  
Which on seav'n Mountains' heads enthroned was.

Here our fantastic poet attacks religious persecution in the manner of Phineas Fletcher's onslaught on Catholicism in *The Appolyonists* and even more closely in imitation of Spenser's House of Pride. The exterior walls are of dead men's bones surrounded by a ditch filled with innocent blood.<sup>38</sup> Satan finds

<sup>36</sup> Compare Charity in the House of Holinesse, *The Faërie Queene*, 1, 10, 30.

<sup>37</sup> Compare Una (Truth), who is reinstated once more as the accepted lover of the Red Cross Knight after his penance, and Browne's Aletheia (in *Britannia's Pastorals*), who embraces Riot after his conversion following a similar repentance.

<sup>38</sup> Compare *The Faërie Queene*, 1, 4, 36. The Sins ride forth from the House of Pride.

"And underneath their feet all scattered lay  
Dead skulls and bones of men whose life had gone astray."

the castle's queen, Persecution, and embraces her with great joy. She promises to proclaim pardon to all who will repent Christianity and come to her. Her departure with her hosts is described in close imitation of Spenser's great pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins. It is the first Spenserian attempt to reproduce the master's great picture of his abstractions of evil in motley procession, mounted on the backs of uncouth beasts.

"Forthwith, in terrible Magnificence,  
An hundred Trumpets sent their Voice before,  
To tell the People that their awful Prince  
Her Progress now began: that stately Roar  
Through every Street imperiously flew,  
And warn'd all eyes this mighty Sight to view

"When lo, the sweating Throngs her way bespread  
With admirations of her Pomp and Train.  
Two squires before the rest at distance rid,  
Suspition and Envy; both did rein  
Their fitting Steeds, the one a Fox, the other  
A Wolf and fore'd them on to march together."<sup>39</sup>

"Then came the Coach which two strange Monsters drew,  
For one a dreadful Lybian Dragon was,  
Who from his mouth did flaming Sulphur spew,  
Empoisoning all the Way he was to pass:  
The other, an enormous crocodile,  
The most accursed Son of happy Nile.

"On them two fierce Postillions mounted were  
Intolerable headstrong Anger, who  
Her Dragon's sides with restless Lashes tore  
Yet knew not why she him tormented so:<sup>40</sup>  
And Cruelty, whose heart was harder than  
His knotty Crocodile's black iron skin.

"Upon the Coachbox sate a Driver, hight  
Selfwil, a madbrain'd most outrageous He;  
Who makes devouring Speed his sole Delight,  
Though thousand Perils chide his Fervency  
Never could Hills or Dales, or Sea or Land,  
Or desperate Precipices make him stand."<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> So in Spenser, *The Faërie Queene*, 1, 4, 30, Envy rides on a wolf.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *The Faërie Queene*, 1, 4, 34. Spenser's Wrath has equally blind passions:

"Yet, willfull man, he never would forecast,  
How many mischieves should ensue his heedless hast."

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *The Faërie Queene*, 1, 4, 34, Satan, the postillion of Pride's chariot.



On the brazen chariot sat the dreadful queen as, in Spenser,  
Pride sat in her car drawn by the six unequal beasts of the  
other Sins:

“Her steely Coat’s all smear’d with gore; her Hands  
Gripe two imprison’d Twists of angry Snakes,  
With which though still her Coachman never stands  
Eternally she threshes him, and makes  
His furious speed more speedy grow, that she  
Might at her Prey as soon’s her Wishes be.”

Her infernal brood followed her: Ravishment, riding upon a  
goat,<sup>42</sup> Heresy on a Hydra,<sup>43</sup> and many others.

Persecution goes to England and, at her summons, many  
flock to her standards. Psyche and the few who stand fast are  
driven forth while the lawless rob, murder, and burn. Psyche  
and a friend, Uranius, take refuge in a cave. A lion, in search  
of prey, rushes into their harborage. But he suddenly becomes  
mild at the sight of the two sufferers, as does the lion before  
Una in Spenser. The two exiles are captured, Uranius is burned  
at the stake, and Psyche is tortured in prison. But Phylax  
frees her and tells her that an even more exalted martyrdom is  
reserved for her lot. Psyche is brought to a desert and aban-  
doned to many trials. Satan sends against her Despair, the  
usual Spenserian figure with hollow, staring eyes and all the  
foulness of Duessa unmasked, armed with rust-eaten swords and  
daggers. This fury makes a long and subtle speech, taunts  
Psyche with her many sins, as Spenser’s apparition taunts the  
Red Cross Knight with his association with Duessa, and incites  
her to suicide. But Psyche remains firm and the hag vanishes  
with a shriek. Psyche burns in a sort of inner fire of religious  
exaltation.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *The Faërie Queene*, 1, 4, 24, Lechery riding on a goat.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *The Faërie Queene*, 1, 7, 16 sq., Duessa rides on a hydra-like beast  
given her by Orgoglio. Cf. also Beaumont:

“When lo, the sweating throngs her way bespread  
With admiration of her Pomp and Train.”

and Spenser:

“Huge routs of people did about them band  
Shouting for joy.” (1, 4, 36)

## SAMUEL WOODFORD

Beaumont's huge epic was ushered into the world with some rapturous commendatory verses by Samuel Woodford, who, although he wrote later than Milton, is worth brief consideration for the more complete understanding of this eccentric though once important school of poetry. Woodford used the favorite stanzas of the Fletchers very freely in his paraphrases of the *Psalms*. He added variations of his own and experimented, even more freely than Quarles, in shortening the lines occasionally to give more lyrical quality to the paraphrases where the originals seemed to demand it. In 1679 he published *A Paraphrase upon the Canticles* with a preface that is full of interest to the student of the history of criticism.<sup>44</sup> But what interests us here is that Woodford, lest the frail reader should find poison in the Oriental langors of the paraphrase, added an *Epoda or Legend of Love*, so styled "for honour's sake to the great Spenser, whose Stanza of Nine I have used, and who has Intituled the six Books which we have compleat of his Faery Queen, by the several Legends of Holiness, Temperance, Chastity, Friendship, Justice and Courtesy." This *Epoda*, imitated partly from Spenser's *Hymne to Divine Love* and partly from the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins in *The Faërie Queene*, shows strongly the exaggerated Puritanism of the School of the Fletchers and their prurience, which despite its idealistic theory is nothing short of strumpet-minded. We cannot be too severe with these tough old divines.

The first canto of Woodford's poems sounds in harsh, sturdy echoes the thought of Spenser's *Hymne*. In the second canto he juggles fluently with Spenserian allegory. Lust, or the devil Legion, came to possess a lost soul. Before he arrived Idleness had swept the empty rooms and darkened the lights and windows. Fancy let in loose Desire. After him the Fiend rode in

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<sup>44</sup> I have discussed this preface at some length in "The Critics of Edmund Spenser," *Univ. Calif. Publ. Modern Philology*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 122 sq.

in triumph at the head of a pageant like that which issued from Spenser's House of Pride:

“So in Desire came vainest of the Three,  
And after him in Triumph rode the Fiend;  
Whom seven Spirits, full as bad as he,  
And Io sang to Love, that Heav'n did tend  
So sang they all, but with unequal grace  
As were their looks; for some their brows did bend,  
And grin'd most horrid with distorted Face;  
Others were blithe and smiled as they along did pass.

“Folly, the First, by her Habit seem'd a Maid,  
And by her Face, which was exelling fair;  
. . . . .  
Mirth was a youth of beautiful regard,  
With chearful Eyes, plump downy Cheeks and Chin,  
. . . . .  
Him Dalliance followed next, a Damsel gay,  
Of light behaviour, as she well could feign;  
And wantonly her Brest did open lay,  
The Lover who came next to entertain;  
Tho' who the He were of her mighty Train,  
She was not much solicitous to know.”

Then came Genius or Comus:

“A right good Fellow, as his Belly show'd  
Which in a Swath reacht almost to his Knee  
And made him passage through th' admiring crowd,  
Which shouting to him louted, as to them he bow'd.”

More grisly figures followed like consequences: Sin with a thousand heads, wretched Poverty, and Death, described with a line plundered from Milton,

“But Death the third, the same shape always kept.  
If Shape it might be call'd, that shape had none.”

Wherever he went he was attended by unquiet Care, Suspicion, Impudence, Riotice, and Irreligion. Without the door waited Distrust, Jealousy, Fear. Such was the company that entered the soul of a wretched man who sought only earthly Love.

We need not follow Woodford in his third canto, where he writes of the moral anarchy described in some of the historical passages in the Old Testament and hymns the rise of lawful

marriage. Nor is it necessary to meddle further with the work of other poets of this school who persisted even into the eighteenth century. Indeed to many readers I shall seem to have exhumed freakish poems out of all proportion. But it is high time that we understood more clearly than any critic has yet set forth the immediate poetic environment of *Lycidas*, *Paradise Lost*, and *Paradise Regained*, the welter of religion and sensuality, of lofty idealism and ferocious bigotry, from which the great Puritan drew far more than we commonly realize. Too much attention has been given to Vondel, Andreini, and other remote influences. Apart from the great Greek and Latin poets and from the great books of philosophy and religion, Milton's literary lineage is to be traced from his master Spenser and from these strange perverted works of a group of poets who had a much greater academic vogue than is now generally understood, the School of the Fletchers.<sup>45</sup>

These curious, half-diseased, half-divine poets were in one respect the truest Spenserians who ever lived. They did not distil the rarest essence of their master as did Milton and Keats and other great English poets. But they did more than merely loot *The Faërie Queene* for lines and stanzas. With the passing of the School of the Fletchers there passed the last ambitious, absurd attempts to rear the cumbersome, tottering framework of *The Faërie Queene* to the very stars. The eighteenth century poets imitated Spenser elegantly and superficially, for the most part, as they imitated all their masters. The romanticists, when they reached their period of full triumph, did not imitate; they were inspired. But the Fletchers and their crew, besides plundering and botching lines and stanzas, outlined gigantic schemes like that set forth in Spenser's letter to Raleigh, that superb manifesto of idealism, and turned Milton from his dreams of Arthur to write audaciously of God and Satan. With the School of the Fletchers such heaven-storming became the fashion in

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<sup>45</sup> I have analyzed the work of the last known poet of this school, William Thompson, in my "Spenser, Thomson, and Romanticism," *Publ. Mod. Lang. Assoc.*, xxvi, 1.

England as it was already the fashion on the continent. We cannot fairly but admire as well as laugh at the rare audacity with which the School of the Fletchers strove to rear Babels of poetry. And in this chaos Milton saw light.

This is the wholesome value of noting the relation of such queer stuff (if you will), and the master work. And the literary historian wonders as he looks down the long avenues of literature at great men and small, whether our hordes of little realists and little romanticists who huddle about the feet of our living masters will have as much to give, two centuries hence, as these Fletchers at whom it is so easy to laugh.

### MILTON

For a while Milton was certainly definitely enlisted in this school. And even when he rose above it in many respects, some influence lingered long. In his earliest poems he followed these academic elders rather closely. He mourns the death of a fair infant prettily and inappropriately enough in cadences that will sound sufficiently familiar to the student of the Fletchers:

“Yet thou art not inglorious in thy fate;  
For so Apollo with unweeting hand,  
Whilom did slay his dearly lovéd mate,  
Young Hyacinth, born on Eurotas’ strand,  
Young Hyacinth, the pride of Spartan land;  
But then transformed him to a purple flower:  
Alack, that so to change thee Winter had no power!”

Like a true Spenserian of his time, he made his subject (in lyric poetry), a mere makeshift for the enumeration of lovely details. Like the Fletchers, he experimented with stanza forms, making the last line of the rhyme-royal an alexandrine. But he had not arrived. In *The Passion* (1630) he employed the same stanza and style to celebrate the subject-matter which was the most real to him all his life. The poet is trying to soar. But, like many far humbler undergraduate poets, he masks his sincerity in the affectations of contemporaries. There is no doubt that he was profoundly stirred by the passion of Christ. But he wrote:

"Mine eye hath found that sad sepulchral rock  
 That was the casket of Heaven's richest store,  
 And here, through grief my feeble hands uplock,  
 Yet on the softened quarry would I score  
 My plaining verse as lively as before;  
 For sure so well instructed are my tears  
 That they would fitly fall in ordered characters."

Milton could not as yet distinguish between Spenser and Spenserians. William Browne, who, in his garrulous *Britannia's Pastorals* could often follow Spenser very charmingly, was also capable of writing:

"My blubb'ring pen her sable tears lets fall  
 In characters right."

But Milton was coming to a realization of his faults. At the end of *The Passion* we read:

"This Subject the Author finding to be above the years he had when he wrote it, and nothing satisfied with what was begun, left it unfinished."

Yet Milton's aspirations were already as immense and as impressive as when he began *Paradise Lost*. I like to compare Milton and Keats when they wrote *At a Vacation Exercise in the College* (1628) and the *Specimen of an Induction to a Poem*. Both were dreaming vaguely and delightedly with Spenser. They were toying with boundless ambitions. Keats was lost in the delight of dancing plumes, glittering cuirasses, and Gothic arches. He had no story to tell. But he was strengthening his wings for *The Eve of Saint Agnes*. Milton's dreams were pleasantly obscured by his luxurious memories of Spenser and his followers. He was poring over Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* and its source, the description of the marriage of the Thames and the Medway in *The Faërie Queene*. He was dazzled by the pageants of stately rivers and aglow with the historical and legendary associations that haunted their banks. With boyish ardor he invoked them:

"Rivers arise; whether thou be the son  
 Of utmost Tweed, or Ouse, or gulfy Dun,  
 Or Trent, who, like some earth-born Giant spreads  
 His thirty arms along indented meads,  
 Or sullen Mole, that runneth underneath,

Or Sevren swift, guilty of maiden's death,  
Or rocky Avon, or of sedgy Lea,  
Or coaly Tyne, or ancient hallowed Dee,  
Or Humber loud, that keeps the Seythian's name,  
Or Medway smooth, or royal-towered Thame."

But his desires were not lulled to slumber by the warm glow and pomp of these visions. He longed to use his language for greater purposes:

"Yet I had rather, if I were to choose,  
Thy service in some graver subject use,  
Such as may make thee search thy coffers round,  
Before thou clothe my fancy in fit sound:  
Such where the deep transported mind may soar  
Above the wheeling poles, and at Heaven's door  
Look in, and see each blissful Deity  
How he before the thunderous throne doth lie,  
Listening to what unshorn Apollo sings."

His youthful Latin poems were more often playful because they followed the lighter verse of Ovid and Horace rather than the high seriousness of Virgil, Tasso, and Spenser. But his *In Quintum Novembris* (1626), a poem on the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot, celebrated the supposed attempts of Satan and the Pope to ruin England through the agency of Guy Fawkes in the academic Spenserian manner then in vogue. In 1626, too, Phineas Fletcher probably completed or was completing his Latin poem on the same subject, the *Locustae* with its English paraphrase *The Appolyonists*, already discussed. Fletcher's poem was not published until the following year and we can establish no definite relationship between his work and Milton's. Both used popular contemporary ideas. Both treated a popular superstition in a vein of classical and Spenserian allegory. But we know that upon *Paradise Lost* Fletcher's poem left a strong impress. And in this academic exercise of Milton's the young poet was strengthening himself for the great epic. He was making his first studies for his picture of the Prince of Darkness:

"And now, in his flight, Satan sees appear the fields girdled by white wave-beaten cliffs, the land loved by the sea-god, named of old from Neptune's son Albion. . . .

"Now his swift flight had carried him beyond the rimy Alps to the

borders of Italy. On his left hand were the ancient land of the Sabines and the cloud-wrapped Apennine; on his right Etruria, ill-famed for its poisoners. Thee too, Tiber, he saw, giving furtive kisses to Thetis."

There follows fierce satire on Catholicism, of the kind which Milton and the Fletchers took too readily from *The Faërie Queene*. Satan came to the Pope as the vile Archimago came to the Red Cross Knight and as the Tempter came to Christ in Giles Fletcher's poem—in the guise of a hermit. In dreams he incited the Pope against England. The poet conjures up a place of horror in the manner of the classical poets and of Spenser's description of Hell in his tale of Guyon's visit to Mammon's dark realms:

"There is a place girt eternally with the darkness of night, the vast foundations of a building long since given to ruin, now the cave of fierce Murder and double-tongued Treachery, whom the hag Discord brought forth at one birth. Here amid heaps of rubble and broken stones lie the unburied bodies of men, corpses impaled on steel. Here forever sits Craft, black, with distorted eyes; and Fury; and Fear; and a thousand types of death. Pale Horror flies about the place."<sup>46</sup>

These apparitions "the Babylonish priest" sent against England. But the Heavenly Father pitied his people and frustrated "the daring cruelty of the Papists." This crude and abusive poem, though drawing the most tasteless elements from Spenser and the Spenserians, foreshadowed vaguely the epic to come.<sup>47</sup>

But Milton's mind was not yet embittered. From some of his more intimate Latin poems we learn that England, at least, was still Fairyland to him. While in Italy he confessed his aspirations to Manso in his most interesting Latin poem. His thoughts go back to his own land and its poets, to Chaucer whom, like Spenser in *The Shepheards Calendar*, he worships as "our Tityrus." "You," he writes Manso,

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *The Faërie Queene*, 2, 7, 22-23. In Mammon's cave, hard by the gates of Hell, lurked "cruel Revenge," Despight, Treason, "gnawing Gealosy," Feare, and many more.

"And over them sad Horror with grim hew  
Did always sore, beating his yron wings."

Of course the famous similar description in the sixth book of Virgil probably stimulated most of these passages.

<sup>47</sup> The quotations above and all subsequent citations from Milton's Latin poems are from William Vaughn Moody's translation, the Cambridge Edition of Milton, Boston and New York, 1899.



" . . . . You, who are so kind, will not scorn a stranger's muse, she who nourished sparsely in the frozen north, lately dared a venturesome flight through the cities of Italy. I too, methinks, have heard, through the obscure shades of night, the swans singing in my river at home, where Thames, bending her argent urns, lets her glaucous locks stream wide into the ocean. What do I say? did not Chaucer himself, our Tityrus, come once to these shores?"

He speaks of his haunting desire to write of Arthur, the national hero whom Spenser had chosen for his *Faërie Queene*. And it seems reasonable to believe that the hero of Spenser was as much in Milton's mind as the hero of the chronicles and romances. For he writes of him as: "Arthur, who carried war into fairyland."<sup>48</sup> To the end his dreams of Arthur were tinged by Spenser's vague, magnificent abstraction. One thinks as much of the dim paths of *The Faërie Queene* as of Malory, despite the citation of names familiar from the *Morte Darthur*, when, in *Paradise Regained*, the blind poet describes the "ladies of the Hesperides," with a characteristic, wistful reminiscence of his earlier epic dreams, as:

"Fairer than feigned of old, or fabled since  
Of faery damsels met in forest wide  
By knights of Logres, or of Lyones,  
Launcelot, or Pelleas, or Pellenore."<sup>49</sup>

#### "ON THE MORNING OF CHRIST'S NATIVITY"

Before Milton had left college, while he was writing for the most part in the ephemeral modes of his day, he spoke out bold and clear once with his own voice. The hymn, *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* (1629) is far more significant than its slightly later companion-piece *The Passion*, which I have already

<sup>48</sup> It is more likely that this is inspired by Spenser than by the legend of Arthur brought to Avalon. The wounded Arthur did not sail to Avalon to carry on war.

<sup>49</sup> *Paradise Regained*, book 2, lines 357 sq. As significant evidence in connection with Milton's fusion of Spenser with sources like Geoffrey of Monmouth, we may note that Milton, in his *History of England* (ed. Symonds, vol. 4, p. 13), quotes a passage from Spenser to supplement Geoffrey much as a modern historian draws from two sources of equal repute. Lest I give false impression here I should add that Milton was sceptical enough about the historical Arthur. The point is that Spenser was clearly almost always in his mind when he thought of the British king.

discussed. It opens with a typical seventeenth century Spenserian prelude in that Spenserian variation of the rhyme-royal for which we have already seen his partiality. William Vaughn Moody chooses a word with a very expressive connotative value when he speaks of the "quaint dulcify" which, through the influence of Giles Fletcher, appears in the opening stanzas.

"See how from far upon the Eastern road  
The star-led Wizards haste with odours sweet!  
Oh! run; prevent them with thy humble ode,  
And lay it lowly at his blessèd feet."

Then the poem leaps into the swift, abrupt, ringing music of *The Hymn*, proper. Whatever lyrical strophes may have been suggestive, the stanza was Milton's own. And here was the first distinctly creative use of a final alexandrine since Spenser had shown its possibilities when he used it to give delicate music to the heavy, pedantic stanza-of-eight (*ababbcbc*). In Milton's new stanza the sharp strokes of the trimeter couplets were controlled by the succeeding pentameters and a tetrameter modulated not too abruptly into the long, solemn swing of the final alexandrine. There are tasteless conceits here and there. But unhappy is he whose sensibilities are so fragile that the flaws blind him to the superb lyrical flashes that abound. Milton seems to have had Spenser as well as the Spenserians in his consciousness. It is probable that he borrowed an elaborate conceit from the *Song to Elisa* in the *April* eclogue of *The Shepherds Calender*, unhappily, to gild over his gold. Spenser wrote:

"I sawe Phoebus thrust out his golden hedde,  
Upon her to gaze:  
But when he sawe how broade her beames did spredde,  
It did him amaze.  
He blusht to see another Sunne belowe,  
Ne durst againe his fyrie face out showe:  
Let him, if he dare,  
His brightnesse compare  
With hers, to have the overthrowe."

The more sonorous lines of Milton, despite their imitative

artificiality of concept, are significant in the development of the music of his maturity:

“And, though the shady gloom  
    Had given day her room,  
The Sun himself withheld his wonted speed,  
    And hid his head for shame,  
    As his inferior flame  
The new-enlightened world no more should need:  
    He saw a greater Sun appear  
Than his bright Throne or burning axletree could bear.”

But Milton was not yet large enough to borrow masterfully, to combine subtly from a dozen sources. How little he had yet accomplished he himself admitted, as he left Cambridge, in the famous sonnet that has been as a quiet, heartening hymn to thousands of young men who have that noble combination of pride and humility.

“How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,  
    Stolen on his wing my three and twentieth year!  
    My hasting days fly on with full career,  
But my late spring no bud or blossom shew’th.  
  
Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth,  
    That I to manhood am arrived so near,  
    And inward ripeness doth much less appear,  
That some more timely-happy spirits indu’th.  
  
Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,  
    It shall be still in strictest measure even  
    To that same lot, however mean or high,  
  
Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heaven.  
All is, if I have grace to use it so,  
    As ever in my great Task-master’s eye.”

#### “L’ALLEGRO AND “IL PENNEROSO”

In rural retirement at Horton Milton’s genius developed by leaps and bounds. That Spenser was good leaven in those days of golden quietude we can hardly doubt when we think of Milton’s ideal surroundings and youthful idealism, perfectly appropriate for a continued perusal of the leisurely *Faërie Queene*. The days of *L’Allegro* and *Il Penneroso* were the

fullest days of detachment and dreams. *L'Allegro* derives remotely from the Spenserian pastoral as developed by Drayton and his friends, Brown and Wither.<sup>50</sup> Spenser, though he had, in the main, followed the beaten path of the Renaissance pastoral, had suggested much to his ingenious followers in his *Shepheards Calender*. He strove to nationalize the pastoral by transferring the crown from the "Romish Tityrus," Virgil, to the English Tityrus, Chaucer. He introduced the more brisk style of the fable, following Chaucer at a great distance. Above all, in the airy roundelay of Willy and Perigot, with its adroit suggestion of popular improvisation, he enlivened the pastoral with a species of light-hearted, semi-popular song like the French pastourelle—which had been forgotten in England since the days of Henryson's *Robin and Makyne* but which had been preserved in effect in France in the blithe notes of Clement Marot. Of the many imitators of *The Shepheards Calender* Drayton and his group were by far the most astute in seizing upon and developing those most fertile ideas which Spenser had barely suggested. Drayton introduced tangibly the much needed element of humor. The languid, plaining shepherd lived on, but Drayton and his friends were for the most part more interested in such liting creations as the ballad of bonny Dowsabelle, imitated from Sir Thopas at the suggestion of Spenser's pseudo-Chaucerian poems. Drayton and Browne gossiped with real countrywives and comed their wondrous lore about Queen Mab and her fairy rout. Browne and Wither sang of may-poles and country-folk so blithely in the light tetrameter measure that Milton doubtless learned much from them when he chose the same metre and very similar subject-matter. *L'Allegro*—peering through the two aged oaks at the cottage chimney, watching Corydon and Thyrsis at their savory dinner,

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<sup>50</sup> This and the following generalizations, relating Milton's *L'Allegro* even remotely with the Spenserian pastorals may seem fanciful to many here. In my "Golden Age of the Spenserian Pastoral," *Publ. Mod. Lang. Assoc.*, xxv, 2, I have tried to show in detail what I conceive to have been the peculiar development of the Spenserian pastoral towards a delicate gaiety that distinguishes it sharply from the English eclogues of Virgilian and Italian lineage.

“Which the neat-handed Phillis dresses,”  
attending a holiday with young and old, drinking the spicy ale while some one told of fairy Mab and the drudging Goblin—is the kinsman of Willy and Perigot, of Drayton’s Batte and Gorbo, Browne’s Willy and Roget, and Wither’s Philarete who sang of fields and dainty nosegays even in prison. *Il Penseroso* is a bit more personal. We catch the young poet at his dearer dreams. Like Spenser he is poring over Chaucer’s alluring fragment, *The Squire’s Tale*:

“The story of Cambuscan bold,  
Of Camball and of Algarsife,  
And who had Canace to wife,  
That owned the virtuous ring and glass,  
And of the wondrous horse of brass  
On which the Tartar King did ride.”

Into the magic glass that Chaucer and Spenser described with wondering delight, Milton had peered as eagerly as Britomart in search of Arthegal. For in earlier days, too, *At a Vacation Exercise*, he dreamed of a cave like Spenser’s and Ariosto’s cave of Merlin wherein dwelt

“A Sybil old, bow-bent with crooked age,  
That far events full wisely could presage,  
And in Time’s long and dark prospective-glass  
Foresaw what future days should bring to pass.”

*Il Penseroso* was reading, too, of the great battle of Camball and Triamond in Spenser’s continuation of *The Squire’s Tale*. He writes of what

“ . . . Great Bards beside  
In sage and solemn tunes have sung,  
Of turneys and enchantments drear,  
Where more is meant than meets the ear.”

Critics have hardly been fanciful in describing this last line as a reference to the allegory of *The Faërie Queene*. And when Milton prepared his *Arcades* for Lady Strange, Countess of Derby, he must have remembered the prodigal honors that Spenser had heaped upon her in *The Teares of the Muses* and in his graceful picture of his other two cousins and her as

"Phyllis, Carilis, and sweet Amarylis," in *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*. The younger poet wrote:

"Fame, that her high worth to raise  
Seemed erst so lavish and profuse,  
We may justly now accuse  
Of detraction from her praise."

Perhaps these last lines have in them a touch of that bitterness which came to the young idealist, even in the seclusion of Horton, with a growing sense of real life. It is the bitterness that afflicts a young poet when he first lifts his eyes from the charmed books over which he has been poring, intolerant, because of his idealism, of human failing, and oppressed with a belief that his own times are degenerate.

#### "COMUS"

In *Comus* and *Lycidas*, despite the lofty faiths which Milton brought to bear against his doubts, the tone of complaint is insistent and impressive. He was turning from the realms of pure romance, from the dim lands of Cambuscan and of Gloriana. Or rather he was coming to question their reality. In Spenser he had read:

"Of Court, it seemes, men Courtesie doe call,  
For that it there most useth to abound:  
And well beseemeth that in Princes hall  
That vertue should be plentifully found,  
Which of all goodly manners is the ground,  
And roote of civill conversation:  
Right so in Faery court it did redound,  
Where curteous Knights and Ladies most did won  
Of all on earth, and made a matchlesse paragon."<sup>51</sup>

In *Comus* Milton accepted from his master the etymology of the word "courtesy" but found the virtue no longer in the place where it originated. His heroine imagined that in the magician disguised as a rustic she had seen

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<sup>51</sup> *The Faërie Queene*, 6, 1, 1.

“ . . . Honest-offered courtesy,  
Which oft is sooner found in lowly sheds,  
With smoky rafters, than in tapestry halls  
And courts of princes, where it first was named,  
And yet is most pretended.”<sup>52</sup>

When Milton came to create a Bower of Bliss in *Comus* he could no longer write with the irresponsible, almost innocent, delight in voluptuousness with which Spenser described the arbors and drunken vines of the languorous Acrasia. The Circe of Homer, Tasso's Armida, Spenser's Acrasia, who all doubtless lingered in the mind of the poet of *Comus*, seduced their victims by sheer bodily beauty. Hazlitt has an ingenious remark worth pondering at this point:

“The character which a living poet has given of Spenser would be much more true of Milton.

‘ . . . Yet not more sweet  
Than pure was he, and not more pure than wise  
High Priest of all the Muses' mysteries.’

Spenser, on the contrary, is very apt to pry into mysteries which do not belong to the Muses. Milton's voluptuousness is not lascivious or sensual. He describes beautiful objects for their own sakes. Spenser has an eye to the consequences and steeps everything in pleasure not of the purest kind.”

This is a reasonable comparison. But I still urge that Spenser had an almost innocent delight in voluptuousness when he made vivid the temptations of Acrasia ostensibly for the glory of Guyon's temperance. It is to be remembered that in an age of enthusiasm art and morals may be perfectly reconciled by the greater minds, while in an age of reason comes restless doubt. Men take sides violently and become cynics or militant moralists, voluptuaries or prudes. In Milton's age sophistication had followed the death of the “first, fine, careless rapture.” Acrasia, as I have said, enticed her victims by frankly exposing her beautiful, naked body. It does not seem necessary to Spenser to inform us that this attractive creature would have us reel back into the beast. Sin may be lovely, but Temperance is so strong that it needs no sight of ugliness to fire it to conquest.

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<sup>52</sup> *Comus*, lines 322 sq.

Ariosto, writing in a very sophisticated period and country, was fain to show that the beautiful Alcina unmasked was a loathsome hag, though he was not, of course, seriously concerned with morality. Spenser borrowed this picture but only for the purposes of religious satire when he created Duessa. Acrasia remained beautiful even when overcome. Milton is more nearly like Ariosto, in this one respect, in temper. But he is even more severe. He never allows us to lose sight of the bestial that leers through all the allurements of sin in *Comus*. Then too, while Acrasia proudly displays her body, Comus must appeal to reason. He is the polished sophist who argues with wonderful plausibility. It is necessary for him to try to buttress frank desire with sneaking reason.

But enough on the sensual in Spenser and Milton. From his "sage and serious Spenser" Milton could certainly draw high moral truths. Belpheobe, Spenser's huntress wandering like Diana through the deep woods, Britomart, the warrior-maiden conquering all lustful knights, Spenser's perfect types of chastity, inspired Milton with faith to write his credo boldly in *Comus*. He speaks through the steadfast brother who believes that chastity is a defence in itself. Still the benignant influence of Spenser's dreams keeps Milton from absolute bitterness:

" 'Tis Chastity, my brother, Chastity,  
 She that has that is clad in complete steel,  
 And like a quivered nymph with arrows keen,  
 May trace huge forests, and unharboured heaths,  
 Infamous hills, and sandy perilous wilds;  
 Where, through the sacred rays of chastity,  
 No savage fierce, bandite, or mountaineer  
 Will dare to soil her virgin purity."

Spenser also had made his Red Cross Knight give Una lofty assurance as he entered the dark and squalid den of Error:

"Vertue gives her selfe light through darknesse for to wade."

And the poet of *Comus* made the confident elder brother say:

"Virtue could see to do what Virtue would  
 By her own radiant light."



Everywhere the presence of Spenser's influence is elusively apparent. Where Milton borrowed so masterfully from Homer, Tasso, Spenser, Peele, John Fletcher, and perhaps many more, it becomes mere pedantry to attempt a collection of unquestionable parallels. Yet the temptation is great. As Milton wrote of his Lady, Virtue incarnate, perhaps it was the memory of Spenser's Sir Guyon or Temperance who, under similar temptations, was protected by the sage advice of a palmer, to describe twilight as

“ . . . Grey-hooded Even,  
Like a sad Votarist in palmer's weed.”

This is an example instructive of how a Spenserian fancy might cling in the background of Milton's consciousness. More striking parallels are not wanting. Spenser writes of “Fayre Cynthia,” who through a cloud

“Breaks forth her silver beames and her bright head  
Discovers to the world discomfited:  
Of the poore traveller that went astray,  
With thousand blessings she is herried.”

In *Comus* the moon is similarly apostrophized:

“ . . . And thou, fair Moon,  
That wont'st to love the traveller's benison,  
Stoop thy pale visage through an amber cloud,  
And disinherit Chaos.’”<sup>53</sup>

When, at the close of Milton's poem, the guardian spirit tells how he had heard from Meliboeus,

“The soothest Shepherd that ere piped on plains,”

how to summon the water-nymph Sabrina, we remember how tenderly she had been sung by Spenser and feel that this Meliboeus, hovering in the background, more powerful even than the protector of the Lady, is a veiled reference, of the kind of which Milton was particularly fond, to his own guardian spirit, Spenser, whose lofty faith in chastity and virtue encouraged Milton to overrule his bitterness in *Comus*.

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<sup>53</sup> *The Faërie Queene*, 3, 1, 43, and *Comus*, lines 331 sq.

"LYCIDAS"

In *Lycidas* this bitterness is more unruly and is, in this case, plausibly traceable, in part, to the influence of Spenser. At least as early as Thomas Warton, critics have pointed out the similarity between the abusive digression of religious polemics in *Lycidas* and the religious janglings of Piers and Palinode in the *Maye* eclogue of *The Shepheards Calender*. Mantuan and Petrarch had attacked bad clergy in their eclogues. But their influence is more remote than that of Milton's chosen master. Moreover Spenser's eclogue was the specific attack of Protestant upon Catholic. In this he was followed by some of his imitators, notably Phineas Fletcher, in *The Appolyonists* and in his *Piscatorie Eclogues* (1633). We have good evidence that Spenser's abusive eclogue appealed particularly to Milton. In *Animadversions upon the Remonstrant's Defence against Smeectymnuus*<sup>54</sup> he quotes from *Maye* one of Spenser's fierce thrusts at corrupt prelates. And the satire in Milton's elegy is markedly similar in spirit and phrase to the harsh lines in Spenser's discordant pastoral. Milton makes Saint Peter, "the Pilot of the Galilean Lake," utter characteristic reproof:

"How well could I have spared for thee, young swain,  
 Anow of such as, for their bellies' sake,  
 Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold!  
 Of other care they little reckoning make  
 Than how to scramble at the shearer's feast,  
 And shove away the worthy bidden guest.  
 Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold  
 A sheep-hook, or have learnt aught else the least  
 That to the faithful Herdman's art belongs!  
 What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;  
 And, when they list, their lean and flashy songs  
 Grate on their scannell pipes of wretched straw;  
 The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,  
 But swoln with wind and the rank mist they draw,  
 Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread."

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<sup>54</sup> Ed. Symmons, vol. 1, p. 197.

And Spenser wrote:

“Those faytours little regarden their charge,  
While they, letting their sheepe runne at large,  
Passen their time, that should be sparely spent,  
In lustihede and wanton meryment.  
Thilke same bene shepeheardes for the Devils stedde,  
That playen while their flockes be unfedde.”

It is interesting to observe that while *Lycidas*, in its general character, turns away from the Spenserian pastoral to the Virgilian, its digressions, the most earnest and personal parts of the poem, derive almost certainly from *The Shepheards Calender*. The ecclesiastical satire, though the lines burn with Milton's fine strength, is not pleasant reading. But the other famous digression—the momentary doubt of the youthful idealist—contains the most beautiful and the most human lines in the elegy.

“Alas! what boots it with uncessant care  
To tend the homely, slighted, Shepherd's trade,  
And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?  
Were it not better done, as others use,  
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,  
Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair?  
Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise  
(That last infirmity of noble mind)  
To scorn delights and live laborious days;  
But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,  
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,  
Comes the blind Fury with the abhorréd shears,  
And slits the thin-spun life. ‘But not the praise,’  
Phoebus replied, and touched my trembling ears;  
‘Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,  
Nor in the glistening foil  
Set off to the world, nor in broad rumour lies,  
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes  
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove;  
As he pronounces lastly on each deed,  
Of so much fame in heaven expect thy meed.’ ”

It is important, for students of literary influence, to notice that while Milton took some of his impulse for this passage from the despair of the young poet Cuddie and the lofty encouragement of Piers in Spenser's *October*, yet he was experiencing, at first hand, precisely the mood which Spenser expressed. Spenser

was doubting, but aspiring to rise to epic heights in his *Faërie Queene*. Milton was expressing the same temporary unfaith and discouragement of youth but meditating none the less upon his great national poem.

In the serene Arcadia of Spenser and his followers, where came no botanists, Milton learned the graceful trick of weaving artificial garlands of flowers from every season. Spenser adopted the flower-passage from earlier Elizabethans and gave it currency in his song to Elisa and his elegy to Dido in *The Shepherds Calender*. He was enthusiastically imitated in the pastorals of Drayton, Barnefield, Wither, Basse and by the School of the Fletchers many times. Milton followed exquisitely the fashion when he bid the valleys—

“Throw hither all your quaint enamelled eyes,  
That on the green turf suck the honeyed showers,  
And purple all the ground with vernal flowers.  
Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,  
The tufted crow-toe, and pale gessamine,  
The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,  
The glowing violet.  
The musk-rose, and the well-attired wood-bine,  
With cowslips wan that hang with pensive head,  
And every flower that sad embroidery wears;  
Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,  
And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,  
To strew the laureate hearse where Lycid lies.”

It is likely, too, that Spenser had his share in inculcating one more faith with which Milton answered the various questionings of his “still small voice.” Spenser, when, in his lament for Dido, he had popularized the pastoral elegy in England, employed a Renaissance convention, the abrupt hopeful turn at the close. In this he was followed by his imitators, Drayton, Browne, and others, and finally by Milton when he wrote:

“Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more,  
For Lycidas, your sorrow, is not dead,  
Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor.  
So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,  
And yet anon repairs his drooping head,  
.

So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,  
Through the dear might of Him that walked the waves,

And hears the unexpressive nuptial song,  
In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.  
There entertain him all the saints above,  
In solemn troops and sweet societies,  
That sing, and singing in their glory move,  
And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.  
Now, Lycidas, the Shepherds weep no more.”

In the same manner, in imitation of Marot, Spenser had written:

“Why wayle we then? why weary we the gods with playnts,  
As if some evill were to her betight?  
She raignes a goddess now emong the saintes,  
That whilome was the saynt of shepheards light:  
And is enstalled nowe in heavens hight.  
I see thee, blessed soule, I see,  
Walke in Elisian fieldes so free.  
O happy herse!  
Might I once come to thee! O that I might!  
O joyful verse!”<sup>55</sup>

We have already seen, from his Latin poem to Manso, that Milton in Italy was still as much in Fairyland as he was when at Horton. The rude awakening, signs of which appear in *Comus* and *Lycidas*, was delayed by travel. But when he returned to England and devoted his activities to the bitter political struggles (1642-1658) he bade farewell to all dreams of an ideal England and an ideal Arthur. The tragedy of the fall of man and the loss of Paradise was more appropriate to his distressed mind. From now on the gentle, passionless visions came back to him only in moods of momentary and wistful reminiscence. Dryden has suggested that Spenser was discouraged from continuing *The Faërie Queen* because the living court of Gloriana fell more and more short of his dreams. Arthegal, or Lord Grey, was ignominiously deprived of his high trust. Sidney, the noblest knight in Fairyland, was slain at the

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<sup>55</sup> In my treatment of *Lycidas* I am under great obligations to Dr. J. H. Hanford. He has made a sound study of this type in his essay on “The Pastoral Elegy and Milton’s *Lycidas*,” *Publ. Mod. Lang. Assoc.*, vol. xxv, no. 3, September, 1910, pp. 403 sq.

climax of his career. Perhaps Milton gave up Arthur because long years of political wrangling made him, like Spenser, lose faith in England's brilliant future. Sir Calidore, Sir Lamorack, and Sir Pelleas had failed to bind Slander, the Blatant Beast. The monster lived on to bring shame and distress and disillusionment upon Milton.

#### "PARADISE LOST"

But when the storm and stress period ceased for Milton he bethought him of another subject upon which, along with that of King Arthur, he had long pondered. Milton manuscripts have preserved for us a number of drafts of a projected play on the subject of the fall of Adam. One striking fact has not been hitherto commented upon. Had Milton worked out *Paradise Lost* along the lines of these early drafts he would unquestionably have written a Spenserian poem quite in the manner of the School of the Fletchers. His sketches are full of the allegories particularly cultivated by his early favorites, the seventeenth century Spenserians. He may have seen the *Adamo* of Andreini while in Italy and have derived inspiration from its allegorical episodes. But the allegories of Spenser and the Fletchers are much closer to the manuscript jottings. And we know that Spenser and the Fletchers ranked high among his favorite poets. Faith, Hope, and Charity are called in to instruct Adam at his repentance as they instruct Spenser's remorseful Red Cross Knight in the House of Holiness. Spenser's allegory of repentance was closely imitated by William Browne in his *Britannia's Pastorals* and, as we have seen, by Thomas Robinson and Dr. Joseph Beaumont, two members of the School of the Fletchers. Mercy and Justice debate as they debated in Giles Fletcher's *Christ*<sup>56</sup> and Phineas Fletcher's *Purple Island*. Conscience, a favorite with Phineas Fletcher, Thomas Robinson, and Dr. Joseph Beaumont, was to have been active in the story of Adam. There is more than enough to show that Milton was full of the fancies of Spenser and of his

<sup>56</sup> A very popular mediaeval allegory, of course. See Miss Hope Travers' *The Allegory of the Four Daughters of God*, Bryn Mawr Dissertation, 1908.

Cambridge followers. And Milton never passed utterly beyond this type of influence even in his mature epic period. I have already stated that Phineas Fletcher had given in his *Apollyonists* and *Locustae* a spirited picture of the conclave in Hell. With him the character of Lucifer, the fiery orator and unrepentant rebel, assumed some of the grandeur that we now call Miltonic.<sup>57</sup> The *Psyche* of Dr. Joseph Beaumont has been plausibly conceived to have influenced Milton in his portrait of Satan and his cohorts, though Milton's fiends are far less grotesque. As Macaulay puts it: "They have no horns, no tails, none of the fee-faw-fum of Tasso and Klopstock,"—and, we may well add, of Beaumont. Vondel and other continental poets had been mindful of the impressiveness of Lucifer. But for our purposes we might even accept without question every new source that is suggested for *Paradise Lost* without taking from the importance of the Fletchers in their relation to Milton.<sup>58</sup> Milton seldom conceived a picture that was not vivified by combined impressions from a dozen sources from which he extracted his elixir.

From now on, except for brief and exquisite allusions to the land of Faerie, we shall find Milton influenced mostly by the sterner side of Spenser. In the very first book of *Paradise Lost* the picture of Mammon among the fallen angels derives from Spenser's grim Mammon who lured Sir Guyon underground:

"Mammon, the least erected Spirit that fell  
From Heaven; for even in Heaven his looks and thoughts  
Were always downward bent, admiring more  
The riches of Heaven's pavement, trodden gold,  
Than aught divine or holy else enjoyed  
In vision beatific. . . ."

<sup>57</sup> We may note here that Dr. Grosart, in his preface to his edition of Phineas Fletcher, lists a great number of passages from Milton's works which he considers to be verbal echoes of the poems of the two Fletchers. Some of these are certainly convincing; others as certainly absurd.

<sup>58</sup> In regard to Vondel's influence it is to be observed that Mr. Edmundson's excellent, if too enthusiastic, *Milton and Vondel* pleads very persuasively for Vondellian inspiration. Yet Mr. Verity in the preface to his edition of *Paradise Lost*, denies the possibility with strong arguments. The present writer has already stated that this paper is, to a certain extent, a protest against the over-emphasis which he conceives to be placed on Milton's continental sources.

Spenser had already placed Mammon's abode near the gate of Hell where sat the terrible figures of Revenge, Treason, Hate, Jealousy, and Fear,—a scene which we have found Milton closely imitating in his *In Quintum Novembris*. In both Spenser and Milton, Mammon is assisted by fiends who in cells and furnaces prepare the liquid gold. It is a stimulating study in artistry to compare the quaint, grotesque lines of Spenser with the gloomy pomp of Milton. In *The Faërie Queene*:

“One with great bellows gathered filling ayre  
And with forst wind the fewell did inflame;  
Another did the dying bronds repayre  
With yron tongs, and sprinckled ofte the same,  
With liquid waves, fiers Vulcans rage to tame,  
Who, maystring them, renewd his former heat;  
Some scumd the drosse, that from the metall came.”<sup>59</sup>

So Milton's fiends, in three groups, with “hands innumerable” and “incessant toil” were busy

“Severing each kind, and scummed the bullion-dross.”

Spenser's fiends are grim as Durer's grotesque woodcuts are grim. The figures in Milton's passages have the impressive Miltonic vagueness. There are, as in Spenser, imps with bellows who

“By strange conveyance filled each hollow nook;  
As in an organ, from one blast of wind,  
To many a row of pipes the sound-board breathes.”

a sounding and inappropriate simile that would have stirred Spenser with a childlike delight if he could have read it. But these Spenserian demons, in Milton's hands, reared Pandemonium, a massive structure which human eyes had never really seen till Milton sang grandly of it:

“Anon out of the earth a fabric huge  
Rose like an exhalation, with the sound  
Of dulcet symphonies and voices sweet—  
Built like a temple, where pilasters round  
Were set, and Doric pillars overlaid  
With golden architrave; nor did there want  
Cornice or frieze, with bossy sculptures graven:  
The roof was fretted gold. Not Babilon

<sup>59</sup> *The Faërie Queene*, 2, 7, 35 sq.



Nor great Alcairo such magnificence  
 Equalled in all their glories, to enshrine  
 Belus or Serapis their gods, or seat  
 Their kings, when Aegypt with Assyria strove  
 In wealth and luxury."

The famous allegory of Sin and Death, in the second book, has a long and complicated genealogy including a number of Spenserian ancestors. Satan, ascending to seek the World and Man found the gates of Hell closed and

"On either side a formidable Shape.  
 The one seemed woman to the waist, and fair,  
 But ended foul in many a scaly fold,  
 Voluminous and vast—a serpent armed  
 With mortal sting. About her middle round  
 A cry of Hell-hounds never-ceasing barked  
 With wide Cerberean mouths full loud and rung  
 A hideous peal; yet, when they list, would creep,  
 If aught disturbed their noise, into her womb,  
 And kennel there; yet there still barked and howled  
 Within unseen. Far less abhorred than these  
 Vexed Seylla, bathing in the sea that parts  
 Calabria from the hoarse Tinaerian shore."

Homer's Seylla is indeed like Milton's Sin. But Homer's enchantresses and monsters, Circe, Calypso, the Sirens, Seylla, had a complicated development which must be glanced at here. Sometimes the enchantress became merely a beautiful mortal tempting the hero to give over his perilous quest. So Virgil's Dido allured Aeneas. Tasso's Armida, the Venus of Camoens, Spenser's Acrasia are poetic daughters of Circe, portrayed with all the charm that exquisite art can give to wantonness. Ariosto's Alcina and Spenser's Duessa, for whose loathsomeness the poet of *The Faërie Queen* was impelled to borrow unhappily from Ariosto's picture of the unmasking of Alcina, are beautiful to the deluded sinner whom they enchant but in reality are horrible and filthy hags. From Duessa Phineas Fletcher developed those unspeakably nasty figures of Caro (the Flesh), and Harmatia (Sin), in *The Purple Island* and of Sin in *The Apollyonists*. We have already seen that Spenser adopted from Virgil the device of placing grim allegorical figures at the gates of Hell

and that Milton followed him closely in his vicious attack upon Roman Catholicism, *In Quintum Novembris*. We have also seen that in the first canto of *The Apollyonists* Phineas Fletcher combines Spenser's scenes at the gates of Hell and the conception of Duessa. We must remember, too, that we find here in Fletcher the spirited conclave in Hell, the fiery speeches of Satan, the advice of various subtle demons, an episode which immediately precedes Satan's ascent to the gates of Hell in *Paradise Lost*. The porter of Hell in Fletcher's poem is Sin, depicted with an imaginative vagueness that is in striking anticipation of Milton's manner:

"The Porter to th' infernal gate is Sin,  
A shapelesse shape, a foule deformed thing,  
Nor nothing, nor a substance: as those thin  
And empty formes which through the ayer fling  
Their wandring shapes."<sup>60</sup>

Like Milton's figure she is the daughter of the Devil. But to deluded youth she is beautiful:

"Her rosie cheekke, quick eye, her naked brest,  
And whatsoe'er loose fancie might entice,  
She bare expos'd to sight, all lovely drest  
In beaunties livery, and quaint devise."

Close by her sits Despair. In the entrance dwells Sickness, Languor, Fear, Horror. Milton's only other guardian of Hell's gate in *Paradise Lost* is Death:

" . . . The other Shape—  
If shape it might be called that shape had none  
Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb;  
Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,  
For each seemed either—black it stood as Night,  
Fierce as ten Furies, terrible as Hell,  
And shook a dreadful dart. . . ."<sup>61</sup>

Spenser, who frequently described Death, anticipated Milton in the effective use of vagueness:

<sup>60</sup> *The Apollyonists*, canto 1, st. 10.

<sup>61</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book 2, lines 666 sq.

“Death with most grim and griesly visage seene  
Yet is he nought but parting of the breath;  
Ne ought to see but like a shade to weene,  
Unbodied, unsoul’d, unheard, unseene.”<sup>62</sup>

A sentence in *The Gospel of James* (1, 15) suggested the allegory of Satan’s offspring, Sin and Death, which became a convention in mediaeval and Renaissance literature.

But we have looked closely enough at the epic characters who did the most to inspire the terrible figures in Milton. To pry further would be vain and pedantic here. On the other hand, frail must be the sensibilities of the Milton admirer who finds this study of sources any occasion for depreciation of Milton’s fathomless creative power. Thomas Warton well says:

“We feel a sort of malicious triumph in detecting the latent and obscure source from which an original author has drawn some celebrated description: yet this . . . soon gives way to the rapture that naturally results from contemplating the chymical energy of true genius, which can produce so noble a transmutation.”

And Shelley felt no shame in prefacing *Prometheus Unbound*, which has the very white-heat of creative power, with a passage that should be deeply pondered by those who think that imitation is only the faith of the scorned critic and the second-rate poet.

“As to imitation, poetry is mimetic art. It creates, but it creates by combination and representation. Poetical abstractions are beautiful and new, not because the portions of which they are composed had no previous existence in the mind of man or in Nature, but because the whole produced by their combination has some intelligible and beautiful analogy with those sources of emotion and thought and with the contemporary condition of them. One great poet is a masterpiece of Nature which another not only ought to study but must study. He might as wisely and as easily determine that his mind should no longer be the mirror of all that is lovely in the visible universe as exclude from his contemplation the beautiful which exists in the writings of a great contemporary. The pretence of doing it would be a presumption in any but the greatest; the effect, even in him, would be strained, unnatural and ineffectual. A poet is the combined product of such internal powers as modify the nature of others, and of such external influences as excite and sustain these powers; he is not one, but both. Every man’s mind is, in this respect, modified by all the objects of Nature and art; by every word and every suggestion which he ever admitted to act upon his consciousness;

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<sup>62</sup> *The Faërie Queene*, 7, 7, 46.

it is the mirror upon which all forms are reflected and in which they compose one form. Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors and musicians are, in one sense, the creators, and, in another, the creations of their age. From this subjection the loftiest do not escape. There is a similarity between Homer and Hesiod, between Aeschylus and Euripides, between Virgil and Horace, between Dante and Petrarch, between Shakespeare and Fletcher, between Dryden and Pope; each has a generic resemblance under which their specific distinctions are arranged. If this similarity be the result of imitation, I am willing to confess that I have imitated.''<sup>63</sup>

To the discerning reader a study of these intricate sources of Milton's Sin and Death gives a wonderful glimpse into the poet's workshop. More mysterious than ever, with his manifold sources, he is like Spenser's sage Phantastes:

"His chamber was dispaigned all with in  
With sondry colours, in the which were writ  
Infinite shapes of thinges dispersed thin;  
Some such as in the world were never yit,  
Ne can devized be of mortall wit.'"

The sterner side of Spenser, I have said, was what Milton found most congenial during the composition of *Paradise Lost*. Many of the minute traces of Spenser's influence here, found in abundance by the commentators, support my assertion as well, in their way, as the examination of the Sin and Death allegory. Such an imposing example of Milton's grandeur, for example, as the famous picture of Satan staggering under Michael's terrific stroke like a toppling mountain has been shown to bear striking resemblance to Spenser's identical simile in the magnificent if rhetorical passage which describes the fall of the old Dragon who symbolizes the Devil.<sup>64</sup> Interesting, too, it is to compare many other parallel passages. Loads of learned lumber on the subject are easily accessible in the numerous editions of Milton where the younger poet's possible indebtedness in line and phrase seems now convincing, now doubtful. Out of so many possible borrowings a fair proportion may be safely accepted. It is hardly necessary, however, to transcribe them here.

<sup>63</sup> *Shelley's Complete Poetical Works* (Cambridge Edition, Boston and New York, 1901), p. 164.

<sup>64</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book 6, lines 195 sq. *The Faërie Queene*, 1, 11, 54.

Though the sterner side of Spenser illumined Milton's gloomy sublimity at times when he dwelt upon the tragic contest of passions and forces good and evil, there is another striking aspect of Spenser's influence upon Milton in his maturity that is charmingly inconsistent. We have already seen, in our examination of the later poems at Horton, how Spenser's idealism helped Milton to overrule his rising bitterness. So too in the stern epics one finds, at times, a spirit of wistful reminiscence gracious and healing as well as melancholy, which is certainly due in part to the persuasive inspiration of the acknowledged master. The coldest readers of Milton are won completely by the austere poet when he allows himself brief recollections of the sensuous dreams of *The Faërie Queene*. Eden is described with Spenserian ardor. In a passage rich with allusion Milton recalls one of Spenser's most enchanting additions to classical mythology, the Gardens of Adonis.<sup>65</sup> Satan saw:

“Among thick-woven arborets, and flowers  
Imbordered on each bank, the hand of Eve:  
Spot more delicious than those gardens feigned  
Or of revived Adonis, or renowned  
Alcinoüs, host of old Laertes' son,  
Or that, not mystic, where the sapient king  
Held dalliance with his fair Egyptian spouse.”

Though Milton was sternly renouncing these fancies he was renouncing them with an audible sigh. The beautiful lines in the ninth book in which he puts them from him, touching them, as he turns from them, with a splendor like a lingering sunset, cannot be read without a feeling of longing for what Milton might have done. He invokes

“ . . . My celestial Patroness, who deigns  
Her nightly visitation unimplored,  
And dictates to me slumbering, or inspires  
Easy my unpremeditated verse  
Since first this subject for heroic song  
Pleased me, long choosing and beginning late,  
Not sedulous by nature to indite

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<sup>65</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 9, 437 sq. Spenser, *The Faërie Queene*, 3, 6. Unsuccessful attempts have been made to find the tradition of the Gardens of Adonis in Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, xix, 4.

Wars, hitherto the only argument  
 Heroic deemed, chief maistrie to dissect  
 With long and tedious havoc fabled knights  
 In battles feigned (the better fortitude  
 Of patience and heroic martyrdom  
 Unsung), or to describe races and games,  
 Or tilting furniture, emblazoned shields,  
 Impreses quaint, caparisons and steeds,  
 Bases and tinsel trappings, gorgeous knights  
 At joust and tournament.''<sup>66</sup>

“PARADISE REGAINED”

Yet with all his austerity this spirit of wistful reminiscence was to survive, throughout *Paradise Regained*, although that poem begins to show traces, as everybody knows, of the severity which culminates in the rarified music of *Samson Agonistes*. Giles Fletcher's *Christ's Triumph and Victory* had dwelt with the subject of the Saviour's temptation, always with quaint, stiff beauty, occasionally with religious fire that burns clear white even to-day. We have seen how closely he followed Spenser. Satan, disguised as an aged hermit, is no more than Archimago who masqueraded in similar fashion to deceive the Red Cross Knight. Like the Red Cross Knight, Christ is brought to the Cave of Despair where, as we have seen, Fletcher follows his master almost verbatim. Satan then tempts Christ with the true luxurious abandon of the Renaissance. Christ's worldly ambition is tested by Presumption in her airy pavilion,

“Over the Temple, the bright stars among.”

He is then brought to the “Bowre of Vaine-Delight.” It is worth while intrinsically to quote once more two of the stanzas which follow Spenser's Bower of Bliss so quaintly and prettily:

“The garden like a Ladie faire was cut,  
 That lay as if shee slumber'd in delight,  
 And to the open skies her eyes did shut;  
 The azure fields of heav'n wear sembled right  
 In a large round, set with flow'rs of light,  
 The flow'rs-de-luce, and the round sparks of dew,  
 That hung upon their azure leaves, did shew

Like twinkling starrs, that sparkle in the eavning blew.

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<sup>66</sup> *Paradise Lost*, book 9, lines 20 sq.

“Upon a hillie banke her head shee cast,  
On which the bowre of Vaine-Delight was built,  
White and red roses for her face wear plac’t,  
And for her tresses Marigolds wear spilt:  
Them broadly shee displaid, like flaming guilt,  
Till in the ocean the glad day wear drown’d,  
Then up againe her yellow locks she wound,  
And with green fillets in their prettie calls them bound.”

This is exactly what we should expect from a pleasure-loving worldly son of the Renaissance. These voluptuous ascetics were fain to decorate the spare lines of the Scriptural stories with delight on delight until they forgot the motif of their poems in their naïve joy in the World and the Flesh. Milton seems to have intended a conscious revolt against the Bowre of Bliss device. “Set women in his eye and in his walk,” said dissolute Belial to Satan, meditating an assault on Christ. But Satan rejects the advice with magnificent scorn. Here the poet speaks in person. Practice, however, fell somewhat short of what Milton undoubtedly intended in theory. As Spenser tempted Guyon with Philotime (Worldly Ambition), and the lascivious Aerasia, as Giles Fletcher followed by choosing Ambition and Wantonness, so Milton, following too at a greater distance, did nothing more than discard the allegory and chose precisely the same epicurian type of temptation. Such Spenserianism lent only a gaudy color to the sober measures of *Paradise Regained* and we cannot thank Milton’s master for an influence which caused such futile divagations. What does, however, dwell with the lover of Spenser is Milton’s brief, wistful recollection of what he might have written had he remained in Fairyland, the thoughts

“Of faery damsels met in forest wide  
By knights of Logres, or of Lyones,  
Lancelot, or Pelleas, or Pellenore.”

#### “SAMSON AGONISTES”

There is no Spenser in *Samson Agonistes*. It is the most personal of Milton’s poems. In music rarified like mountain air Milton spoke entirely of his own griefs and closed with a hymn of victory so austere that to the weak majority of men it

sounds like despair. The last gleam of the faiths that Spenser cherished had waned. It is difficult for us to realize with sufficient dramatic intensity the awful depth of the spiritual tragedy that reached its catastrophe for Milton with the Restoration. Elsewhere I have written of this age as an Age of Literary Anarchy, a period of intellectual strife and bewilderment that struck dead most faiths. *Samson Agonistes*, if we understand it with dramatic sympathy, should appeal to us more than any of Milton's other poems. It should set fire to the spirit of hero-worship that is in all of us. For while this grand poem burns with his sorrow over his blindness, his bitterness towards women, the defeat of his political cause, while it breathes his large hatreds and his petty hatreds, yet from the depths Samson emerges. The poem trumpets Milton's love and fear of God, a God as terrible as the Hebraic Jehovah, but a God who has his appeal to all good fighting-men. Milton drew proudly aloof from his age and rose above it—not selfishly but to show to his distracted fellow-men the triumph of life. He who would truly love Milton must learn to love him not only when he dreamed delightedly with Spenser and when he looked back longingly to the Fairyland of Spenser which he had elected to leave, but also finally when in all his gloom he forged out the proud faith that is uttered in the noble stoical lines of Manoa:

“Come, come; no time for lamentation now,  
Nor much more cause. Samson hath quit himself  
Like Samson, and heroically hath finished  
A life heroic.”

Here, not in the noisy bravado of Nietzsche's creation, do we find the true superman. This sternness was not Spenser's. The spirit of wistful reminiscence had faded. The gentle land of Faërie had crumbled away. But out of all the sorrows of its loss what a mighty victory had Milton won when his voice uttered the last words of his chorus! I am not concerned with the truth or untruth of its orthodox tenets. It is so easy to jeer at high heaven that these last words of Milton may seem superficial enough to many. But as a faith sounded forth from the depths,



after the bitterest of life-struggles, is there not the awe of divine things in its calm?

“All is best, though we oft doubt  
What the unsearchable dispose  
Of Highest Wisdom bring about,  
And ever best found in the close.  
Oft He seems to hide his face,  
But unexpectedly returns,  
And to his faithful Champion hath in place  
Bore witness gloriously; whence Gaza mourns,  
And all that band them to resist  
His uncontrollable intent.  
His servants He, with new acquist  
Of true experience from this great event,  
With pride and consolation hath dismissed,  
And calm of mind, all passion spent.”



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